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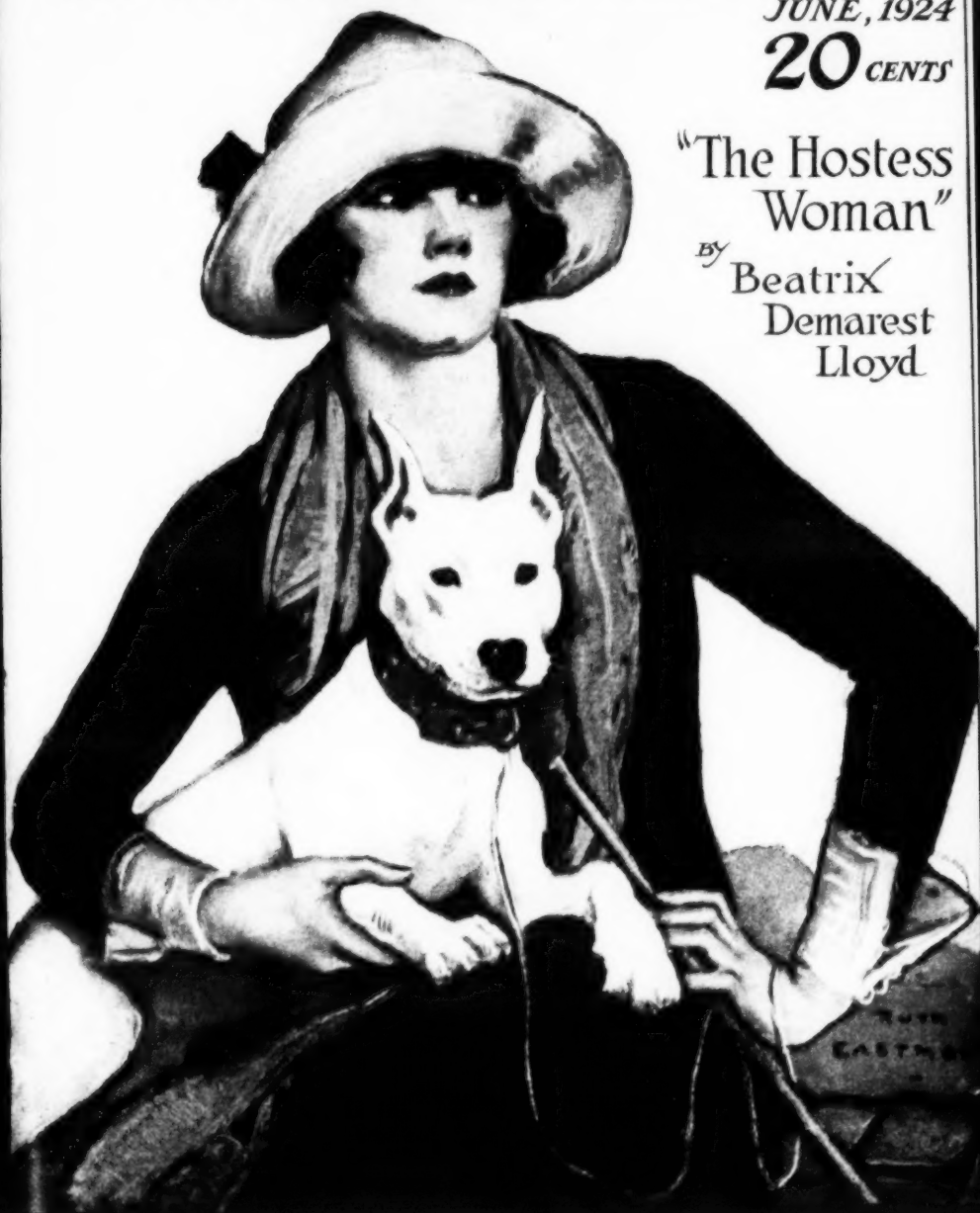
THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

JUNE, 1924

20 CENTS

"The Hostess
Woman"

By
Beatrix
Demarest
Lloyd





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June
1924

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. LIII
No. 4

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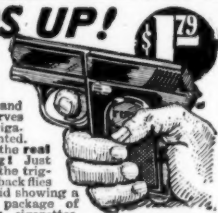
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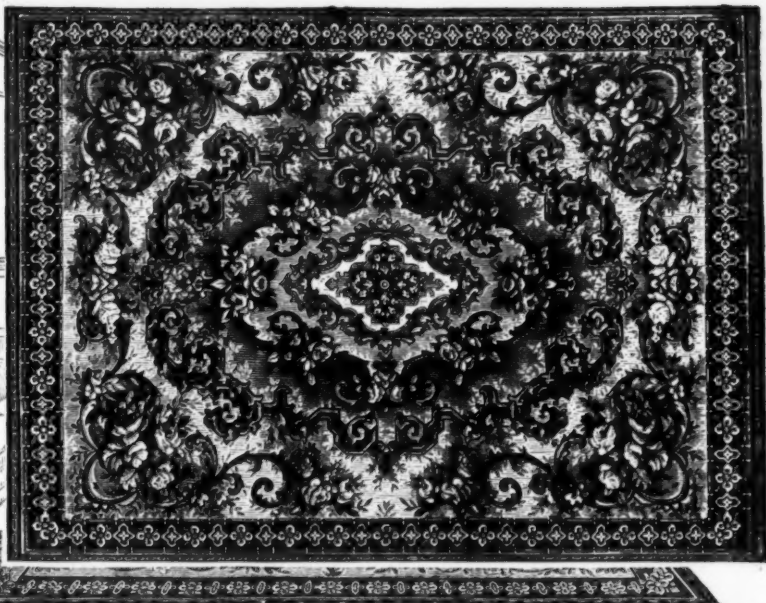
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The Hostess Woman

By

Beatrice Demarest Lloyd

Author of

"The Murder of William Jocelyn Ferris,"
"A Touch of Sun," "Cock Robin," etc.



CHAPTER I.

DESPITE its being the acknowledged Government House of social Manhattan, punctiliously discharging its multifarious duties to society, charity, family, and friends, the household of Peter Du Rijj Joralemon moved through its yearly orbit with dignity and precision, meticulous, efficient, and unhurried. The great, graystone house, reminiscent of the Rijkshuis of Brabant, withdrawing its steep Dutch roof with an effect of patrician ignoring of the palaces of trade that surged to its very foundations, stood in its incongruous surroundings, oblivious to change.

Doomed as its standards were, it still held rigid against all compromise with importunity, ruthlessly overlooking the

new millionaires, and showing no interest in certain foreign princelings so eagerly gathered into the roster of another fold. Many of those who found no chill reception beyond its great bronze doors came thither in conveyances that brought almost a flavor of museum interest, while countless limousines of the last word in magnificence slipped past, their very chauffeurs conscious of their exclusion from these portals.

Within, its stately rooms opening out in vistas that adequately balanced its high-studded ceilings, it was of a surprising warmth and mellowness. Stubborn old Madame du Rijj it had been who, being utterly unimpressed by the vogue of black walnut, had preserved the original Flemish furnishings that had been brought over in his own ship

three hundred years ago by the adventurous Jan de Ruyter, himself a brother of that admiral who stirred the air of Westminster with the echo of his cannon off Chatham. The ladies of the family had carried forward a traditional devotion to needlework, so that from the earliest farmstead days in Nieu Amsterdam there had always been a busy group of linen maids whose handiwork had spared the family the Victorian horrors of horsehair and plush. These priceless lengths of solid stitchery hung in the wide doorways, cushioned the great, carved benches and chairs, curtained and covered the immense tester beds, and in some rooms tapestried the walls. In the dining room the famous silver peacocks trailed their flexible, jeweled tails across a dais giving on the treasured, amber-topaz Crabeth window, by Dirck and Wouter. Nothing had been added to the De Ruyter nucleus that could not worthily be placed in such association. The drawing-room was still lighted with candles, and so many were there required for its illumination that a special "chandelman" among the servants was charged with the sole duty of their care.

Peter du Rij Joralemon, having inherited both estates with a fair slice of the Van Schuyk fortune, and being manager of the De Ruyter property belonging to his wife, who was his third cousin, perpetuated no medievalism in his commercial holdings, however, as the Rutgers, Westervelt & Wynkoop office towers testified, being notable among the gargantuan plinths of the lower city. What had come to him as a fortune, he had more than doubled, and, having no son, had never relinquished his active management of his affairs.

It was from this famous house that Anneke, their only child, had been married to Blessington Pell, whose steady rise in the estimation of his countrymen had sent him finally as ambassador to the Court of St. James, where he had, this two years gone, died suddenly at

his post. The coincident illness of Mrs. Joralemon made it impossible for her and her husband to go to the young widow, and she read at home the journalistic details of the solemn requiem and interment in England with satisfaction, if no elation, for she considered the We tins themselves no better than her own family. It is almost a forgotten thing in these days of Pilgrim and Puritan societies, that the pride of these New Yorkers was rooted in the Old World, and that the coming over of the *Mayflower* was a quite negligible incident in their eyes.

Odd as it might seem to one who did not know the exclusiveness of that circle, which considered the well-winnowed assemblies too laxly indiscriminate, whose leader administered a social snub to a mere President of the United States, young Mrs. Pell had gone to a far more democratic society in London, in spite of the exigencies of her official position, and, indeed, had had the amusing experience of presenting to their majesties a lady or two who had never received a nod from her own mother.

Anneke Pell was unconscious of a sense of release, for the blood pride of her people had never seemed to her anything more irksome than quaint, but it is true that, with her amazing gift of making friends, she had found a great happiness in being able to choose them where they grew, irrespective of their forbears. After her most intimate friend, the Duchess of Bishopston, there was no doubt that next in her regard stood the young Countess of Crewe who had danced into the title direct from the stage of the Gaiety Theater.

Yet Anneke Pell, who never took herself seriously, was conspicuously what was called in the days of Louis of France, a great lady. She had courage, a superb stoicism that comes from generations of well-bred folk; she had a sensitive sympathy; a brain that func-

tioned with the quickness and dependability of a highly trained servant, yet with the originality and unexpectedness of a humorous mistress; an elegance that was only partly the result of the lines in which her life had been cast; a pure heart and not an atom of snobbism. Tall like her father, she had inherited her mother's fine-grained, rose-leaf skin and golden hair. She was indeed "pretty to walk with, witty to talk with, and pleasant, too, to think on."

Blessington Pell—to tell the truth, rather a stupid man of the sterling worth that often goes with mediocre brains—had been devoted to his young wife, proud of her success, her popularity, and prominence in London, and generous in all his dealings with her, but he had never stirred her heart to one throb above its normal seventy-six. It was, perhaps, a little this want in the relation between them that made a corresponding lack in his feeling for their daughter, another Anneke, but the birth of this child had seemed to affect him very little. To be sure, she had been nursemaided and governessed even more than to the usual extent, owing to the hourly demands upon her mother's time, but she was a healthy, happy child, and, far from being conscious of any neglect, thoroughly enjoyed her freedom from the cares of daughterhood. Born in Washington, she had gone with them to England, a rosy, hearty youngster, but the last three years, owing to her own desire, had seen her back in her native country, a member of the famous Brinckerhoff School, which summered in the Adirondacks, spent the early winter in Florida, brought its pupils to New York for the opera, and took them to Paris in the spring, effectively removing them from the uncertain influences of home life.

Nikki, as she was called, had with great dexterity evaded any visits beyond those of courtesy calls to the Joralemon house, having often been in the city

without letting her grandparents know of it, for, coolly as she appreciated the advantage of having been born a member of the set ruled by these autocrats, she shrewdly surmised that a certain restraint was correlated with its eminence, a restraint she preferred to postpone until her years increased her ability to resist it. So the cable announcing her father's death reached her in the mountain camp, scarcely in advance of the newspapers whose front pages bore the news in extended display.

Mrs. Pell remained abroad, visiting friends, and traveling about a bit with them, vaguely regretful that she felt no poignant grief in her bereavement. And it was difficult for her to make up her mind to leave the environment that had become so dear to her to return to live in America. But letters from the Joralemons and some from Christian Bentinck, her lifelong friend and man of affairs, urged her to the change, and a real longing for her daughter finished her hesitation.

So that, if anything could have ruffled the calm of the great gray house, her home-coming might have done so. It received her, however, warmly but without excitement, and she found herself after a formally served, simply vianded dinner, talking with her parents in her mother's sitting room as tranquilly as if she had never been away.

Mrs. Joralemon, with the coffee service on a table beside her, her little velvet-shod feet on the footstool which her childish height made necessary to her comfort, watched with staid composure her graceful daughter fitting a cigarette into a jeweled holder. Her husband was conscious of surprise in her acceptance of this innovation, and of a certain amusement, he could scarcely say why. He had, to be sure, many moments of smiling appreciation of this pretty little old tyrant, and those who had only seen her Dutch-blue eyes freeze into a formal blankness could have no intimation how

merrily they could twinkle in response to a quizzical glance from her Peter. But she was not smiling at the moment as her daughter said to her:

"Mother, as one Anneke to another, what do you think of taking Nikki out of school now?"

"I approve," said Mrs. Peter shortly.

"I think your mother, my dear, has never liked the separation of Nikki from her family."

"I never quite liked it, myself," said Mrs. Pell, "but the child so disliked the English schools, and surely the Brinckerhoff—"

"The Brinckerhoff has the very highest standing. Otherwise——" Mrs. Joralemon made a gesture with her plump, white hand which indicated that otherwise its very prospectus would have swept to the floor. "But nothing could take the place of the upbringing she could have had here."

"Well, well, she is only sixteen," put in Joralemon gently. "It's not too late to save her."

Mrs. Joralemon smiled at him.

"She is a dear child, quiet and polite; quite unlike," she added with a fastidious shiver, "the daughters of some of our people."

"It will do us all good to have her here," said he thoughtfully. "It is almost two years since we saw her; actually two years."

"She has been traveling about so much," said Mrs. Pell half absently. "Well, I'll write. She is in Hot Springs now." She dotted the ash of her cigarette into the pewter dish on the table beside her. "There's something else——" She glanced uncertainly at her mother. "Do you know Marley Thomson?"

"Thompson?" echoed Mrs. Joralemon, in the tone of one vainly trying to recall the name of an erstwhile coachman.

"No; Thomson without the P," said her husband. "I know of him, certainly. He's a wealthy man, an automobile

manufacturer. But he comes of a fine old Tory family, Baron Rumford's branch."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pell.

"Well, wherever you heard of him, Ann," said Mrs. Joralemon somewhat sharply, "what put him into the conversation? I may trust he does not hope to marry Nikki?"

"No, he wants to marry me," said Anneke, half smiling.

"People do," commented Mrs. Peter serenely. "We've heard rumors of several: Wessex, and Colonna, and that queer nephew of the Ffolliotts who was forever masquerading off to Lhasa. I can't say we heard of Thomson. It is not likely we should."

Joralemon was looking at his daughter.

"You haven't said yes?"

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Joralemon sat up more straightly with the exclamation. She had not for one moment taken the matter seriously.

"Are you—do you—do you love him, Ann?" asked her father.

"He's so—I can't tell you—so determined I shall. And I do. You know"—she rose suddenly, her lovely face flushing to her eyes—"I don't think I ever loved Blessington at all. I should have been happier, and—and sorrier, and—everything more, if I had," she told him.

"Don't you be a goose, Anneke," said her mother affectionately, but with a touch of disdain. "You were quite happy with Blessington. He was years older than you, and not of the demonstrative type, perhaps. But he was a worthy man, and a gentleman of your own world. Thomson, indeed!" The old De Ruyter face tilted scornfully upward. "Impossible!"

"I am afraid it is highly probable, mother," said Mrs. Pell gently. "We haven't announced our engagement, of course, but——"

"Never!" cried Mrs. Joralemon, her

eyes blazing. "Never! Not while I live and breathe!"

"My dear," said Peter, going to her side and laying his hand upon her shoulder, "you are extremely likely not to do either, if you excite yourself. Let us talk of this another time, Ann." He gave her a look over her mother's head.

Mrs. Joralemon controlled her agitation. She had a due respect for her health, and, being no fool, saw quite clearly that nothing more than a disagreement was to be reached at this moment, unprepared as she was for so unexpected an encounter. And as at this opportune moment her page, without whom she never took a step, came in to hold her shawl, she rose, and took her husband's arm.

"You see, I am still under a strict regimen, Anneke," she said. "You may kiss me good night." And she left the room with great dignity, her protest unanswered.

CHAPTER II.

Marley Thomson, quite unconscious of his temerity in casually ringing for admission to the formidable fortress of De Ruyter pride, came to call the next day, a bleak afternoon that justified the fire before which he found the lady of his thoughts. The reddish glow from the logs in the big, Dutch-tiled fireplace conflicted cheerily with the candlelight made necessary by the early November dusk. Anneke Pell, a gracious figure in soft old lace, faced him near the hearth as he entered.

"I say, what a wonderful old place! Just the sort of quaint palace you should live in. But is a telephone too great an anachronism?"

"Not at all. We have four, no less. But they are not in the book."

"They wouldn't be!" He took both her hands. "It is good to see you again."

"Well, considering you met me at the dock yesterday——"

"A long time ago! I've almost forgotten—let me see——" He turned her toward the branched candles near by and looked at her hungrily. "Was ever such a face? Ann! Ann!"

She slipped from him, making for the greater security of a high-backed rail chair, and he followed to stand smiling down at her. He was a personable lover, be his name what it might be.

"Ever elusive!" he said indulgently.

A faint frown gathered about her eyes.

"I'm not in the mood for philandering," she said seriously.

"I like that 'philandering,'" he demurred. "You grant nothing and I take nothing. But you've kept me dangling in the face of all Europe these months. I am in a mood, Ann, to ask when you plan to announce our engagement now that you are at home at last."

"Sit down, Marley. I want to talk to you about something. Something that will strike you as rather laughable."

"If it's this idiotic notion of yours that I am younger than you——"

"That," said Mrs. Pell quietly, "is not an idiotic notion. It is a fact."

"Fact or no, you have had time to consider it. Do you think we shall be more of an age when we are both gray-haired?"

"To be sure we shall. But the eight years between us have nothing to do with this. Of course, they would not go unnoticed by our friends. They would smile and jeer, remind one another that I have a daughter old enough to be your wife——"

"But what does it matter? I don't want to marry your daughter, as it happens."

Mrs. Pell sat silent a moment, her chin in the heel of her palm, staring into the fire.

"I wonder what Nikki would think of it!" she murmured.

"I find myself more interested in what

you think of it," he retorted with some coldness. He turned away, one hand going over his glossy black head. "I also dislike your tenses." Abruptly he came back to her, the whole magnetic charm of him seeking her. "Ann, are you just tormenting me? I've been so sure! What is this laughable thing you want to tell me about?"

"Well, do sit down, and I'll tell you. The fact is my family does not regard you as an eligible suitor."

Her amused eyes dwelt upon his perplexed face. Having gone warily for years among the snares laid for him by a horde of hunting mothers with marriageable daughters, he had naturally never anticipated being rebuffed as a detrimental. After a moment he rammed his hands into his pockets, thrust his smartly shod feet outward, and cocked his head impishly.

"You interest me," he said.

"You see, you have known me only in my official position, where I had to know all sorts of people, third earls, and birthday honors, and all such mushroom nobility. In my private capacity as daughter of Dutch burgomasters, I am much more exclusive."

She laughed softly, and his good-humor could not but join in.

"This is rather a treat," he admitted. "I am willing to admit that I doubted your family would consider me worthy of you, and all that sort of thing. But I did hope that, at least, my old Tory blood would tell, you know."

"You should know we are Whigs," she said smiling. "It must, of course, be rather surprising to a spoiled child of fortune. You will have to get around them, Marley. I have no doubt you can. At any rate, I give you leave to try."

"Ann!" In one movement, he was on his knees beside her chair. "Does that mean yes?"

"Are you so sure, Marley? Wait till you hear my mother say: 'Thomppp-

son!'" She said it lightly, but she had unconsciously drawn a little back at his approach, which was all that he noticed.

"Don't hold yourself away from me, Ann. Are you not sure of yourself? Or do you doubt me? It cannot be what people think? What do they matter? Or Nikki? You are not willing to give up our life together for that? It's poor thanks you'd get to take the place of our happiness. Because you would be happy. You may think you've had everything in the world, Ann; but you haven't. You haven't had even your own youth!"

The words struck a response from her heart. She had known the atrophy of her girlishness where little more than dignity was demanded of her. But she had not been trained to clear thinking to let a self-acknowledged moment of emotion cloud her wits.

"Well, you must wait," she said gently, and rose.

There was something so desirably exquisite about her that he fairly groaned at her still withdrawal.

"You are so good to look at," she went on. "And you've tones in your voice that a woman would do well to beware of! It all distracts my attention from—from Marley Thomson," she finished with a sudden flash of seriousness.

"The despised Thomppppson," he said, towering to his feet with a touch of surliness. "Well, Ann, when may I meet your people—since you seem to take their opposition seriously? May I telephone you?"

"I think—if you will be a little patient—it would be better if I send for you."

"This is indeed a rarefied atmosphere, Ann. I find myself gasping for air. I can't quite believe this is the reason for your hesitation. You may not really know it yourself, but I think there is something else. However, I have waited a long time, and I can wait a little

longer." He went moodily toward the door.

"I will write you soon," she said softly.

He turned to look at her. The utter perfection of her held him a moment, envisaging her poised beauty. But unfulfillment, disappointment, made a barrier between them, his own and—he could feel it—hers. Keenly as he knew he could never reach her standards, his desire for her made him ruthless. Let him but make her his, and her happiness would follow somehow. With a baffled, half-angry: "Thank you," he bowed and turned to leave her.

At that moment, however, his going was canceled by the appearance at the door of Cabot, the butler, with a repressive hand on the portière, and of Mrs. Joralemon herself with a hand upon her page's shoulder. Neither Marley Thomson nor Mrs. Joralemon needed to be told the other's name, but Anneke Pell came swiftly forward to make the introduction.

"I am so glad you came in, mother," she added smiling. "I wanted you to know Marley."

"I have been for my drive. I always come in at this time, and Cabot told me Mr. Thomson was with you." She managed to give this uncompromising speech a formal touch of welcome. She moved forward to sit in the railed chair by the hearth, and lifted her little feet to the wooden stool that her attendant slipped beneath them. "Cabot will send in the tea. I dare say you think me very old-fashioned, Mr. Thomson, to go driving instead of motoring. But we have always taken great interest in our stables, though I attract almost as much attention now behind my horses as my grandfather did when he drove up Fifth Avenue behind his white Bassora hinnies. My husband likes motors, so he has some, and I suppose Mrs. Pell will be having hers."

"Marley will think you are talking

shop to him, mother," said Anneke with a laugh.

"I don't mind," said Thomson, "because I can hold my own about motors, but I haven't an idea what a white Bassora hinnie may be."

"It's nothing but a superior sort of donkey, Marley. My revered ancestor startled the town by paying several thousand dollars for the pair of them, and old Mr. Huydecoper used to call the turnout 'the picture of we three.' Here's the tea, mother. Will you pour it, or shall I?"

"Pray do," said Mrs. Peter. "You met my daughter in England, Mr. Thomson?"

"I did, and although I followed her all over the better part of Europe I was always meeting her again."

Mrs. Joralemon accepted this pleasantries as if she were handed it in her teacup.

"I dare say my daughter has told you that we do not welcome the suggestion of her marrying again."

Marley Thomson gave a faint gasp at this plain speaking, but he carried her frankness a bit farther.

"She has, rather, told me that you do not welcome me as a husband for her."

"You will, of course, prefer to talk to Mr. Joralemon about it," said the autocrat unbendingly. "We do not mean our objection to be construed as a reflection upon you. As a visitor, Mr. Thomson, you are very welcome."

Marley Thomson was spared the difficult matter of making some suitable reply to this unpromising reception by the voice of Cabot—a voice which knew enough to say "Quincy" when the card read "Coenties"—announcing another visitor. This Mrs. Coenties was very pretty, very smart, and very well dressed, as, indeed, she had need to be all these things, being admittedly the greatest bore in a circle that was sometimes accused of being exclusively restricted to bores. And Mrs. Joralemon

immediately upon her arrival prepared for departure, lingering only long enough to reflect regretfully upon her strict regimen that sent her to rest this hour before dinner, and went away. Mrs. Peter did not suffer fools gladly.

Mrs. Coenties chatted uninterruptedly of her own doings, the coming season, the entertainments, asking many questions of her dear Ann, for none of which she waited for answers. Of course, her dear Ann would be going out again, and when she did how delightful to have the house awake and alive again after its long retirement owing to Mrs. Joralemon's illness. And so forth, and so forth. Thomson, giving up all hope of getting in a word and quite conscious that as even a welcome visitor he had stayed long enough, finally went away himself, with no better comfort for the rebuff he had sustained than a half-glancing look of commiseration from his divinity.

But Mrs. Pell was not doomed to suffer Mrs. Coenties' banalities alone, for Thomson was scarcely gone when another caller arrived whose name brought a sudden flash of genuine delight to the face of his hostess.

Christian Bentinck ambled into the room a moment later, drawing off his gloves, and bringing with him, for all his genial manner of doing something, like drinking tea with two ladies, quite absorbingly agreeable, his invariable impression of having just left occupations of the utmost importance. He had a rather long, humorous upper lip, very grave gray eyes, set in deep, radiating wrinkles, thick gray hair which grew in a pleasant line about his temples, and long, bony hands of a deftness that was astonishingly unobtrusive. He did things great and small, important and otherwise, with a facility that leveled them all to easy accomplishment. Thus he played polo with the same air of its being merely something he was doing at the moment, as he signed checks, raced

his boat, played his piano, or, as in this case, accepted a cup of tea from his hostess.

Mrs. Coenties was a little fluttered at meeting him, as she always was slightly agitated by finding herself in the presence of what she called brainy people, but Bentinck was quite calmly at home, and Anneke Pell contented herself with his welcome presence.

He talked a little, laughed easily, listened in a stimulating way that made Mrs. Coenties feel she was being unusually a social asset, picked up her furs when she dropped them on rising to go, let them fall upon her shoulders at exactly the right angle and just when she was ready for them, crossed with her to the door without making her departure awkward, and came back to finish his tea, all with an air of leisure and assurance impossible to describe.

"May no one else come in!" said Mrs. Pell from her favorite corner of the divan.

"Nobody will," said Bentinck with a quiet smile. "I told Cabot that I had to see you on business matters of importance. You don't mind? I do so thoroughly enjoy telling a whopping fib."

Anneke looked at him appreciatively.

"How on earth do you contrive always to do the right thing?"

"I am about to disappoint you," said Bentinck. "I came to do something I have no business to do at all. Let's have a cigarette." He lighted his and hers, and sat down in a big chair obliquely facing her. "You see, I am going to ask you questions, which I have no right to do, in spite of being your man of business. And I haven't asked your permission. I call it a matter of flagrant impertinence, quite out of line with the excellent character you give me."

Mrs. Pell was silent.

"Perhaps I shouldn't say questions; after all, it is all summed up in one: Anneke, what are your plans?"

"Plans?" A flush rushed up, irradiating her lovely face. Bentinck looked at her steadily. Somehow there was nothing at the moment in the least humorous about his long upper lip. "I don't think I have made any very definite plans, Chris."

"You mean that, seriously?"

"Quite."

"Then it is high time you did. Nikki will be home soon, I suppose?"

Mrs. Pell nodded. And Bentinck produced his bomb.

"I want you to take her away."

"Away!" she echoed in amazement.

"I understand how absurd that sounds. Nikki has been very obviously away for a long time. Nevertheless I repeat myself. And there is a vast difference which you may have overlooked between her being away and your being away with her."

"But away from what?"

He smoked silently for a moment.

"Anneke, my dear, you live in a niche like a saint in a chapel," he said at last and paused again. "You won't forget that I am that relic of the church, Nikki's godfather. In other words, I feel a responsibility other than of the care of her money, although I have no shred of authority. I think, Ann, you may be surprised to find how few shreds of authority even her mother has over the modern youngster, although she be by no means of what is so quaintly called a legal age."

Mrs. Pell sat very still, watching him.

"Your meaning has not yet reached me, Chris," she said. "You think she will throw her money away? Or do you think she is in danger of being married for it? Or what? And what has it to do with your idea that I live in a niche?"

"I happen to be quite certain that Nikki will not live in a niche."

"But why should she? I don't quite see your point that I do myself. But it is quite natural that Nikki should want to be flying around, at her age."

Bentinck rose and went, as a man under some atavistic instinct often does, to stand nearer to the fire, be the room never so warm.

"My dear girl, you know as much about the modern young woman as you do about the domestic habits of the three-toed horse—but, perhaps, with your other specialties, you include a thorough acquaintance with the Eohippus?"

Ann laughed at his absurdity.

"Somebody has been scaring you with tales of the 'flapper,'" she said. "Or, perhaps, you've had experience with a horrible example. Young girls are always silly, Chris. I was myself."

"To be sure. I don't want you to think I am merely an old fogey, who has forgotten his own—and other people's—follies when I say that a remarkable change has come over the silliness of adolescence. I believe some of our worthy contemporaries ascribe the change to the immeasurable liberties attainable by the happy possessors of motor cars."

She half laughed at his assumed didacticism and half frowned.

"I am inclined to believe you are being disagreeable, Chris. However, setting aside your unpleasant assumptions regarding Nikki in the full tide of liberty, you'll admit that, at least, she has no motor?"

"Don't be a goose, Ann. I want to tell you, and with all the force you will assign to my true friendliness, that I do not consider Nikki's life in this town as anything but a mental and moral illness from which she must be saved," he said.

"But I——"

"But you will chaperon her! Ann, you have as much chance of bringing up your daughter as you have of putting salt on the tail of a racing Fokker. My words may have no weight with you, but for my own peace of mind I must make sure I have done my best."

If you would take Nikki on a nice long trip, several times around the world, like the diagrams in the papers of the extent of the wasted milk bottles placed end to end, you might bring her back at a less harmful period."

"But, Chris, I don't want to go away."

"I know that," he said slowly and somberly.

"You know that——"

"I know that," he repeated.

"That I am thinking of marrying again?"

"I know that," he said for the third time.

She had not meant to tell him, and perhaps she had an unworthy moment of pique in his taking her announcement without surprise.

"You haven't much warmth of interest about you," she remarked lightly, but a shade unkindly.

Bentinck looked down at her so long in silence that she lifted her eyes to his at last, and, in the shock of what she saw there, her heart stood still. Still with his look, unwavering, into her face, he began slowly, and in a curious, forced voice quite unlike itself, to answer her.

"If I seem unfeeling, Anneke, I shall have to explain myself. I don't let go my hold upon myself, not because there is so little to restrain, but because I am not certain that the devil of a passion for you that rages in me could ever be brought to heel again." He took a step nearer her, looking down into her wide eyes, his hands gripped into one fist behind his back. "I have loved you all my life; even when I was a little boy I loved you better than anything I could even dream of. I set you so high in my hopes, that I couldn't ask for you till I felt I was better worth the gift of you. You never knew it, Ann; you never saw it; I often wondered why. Everything I thought and did, I thought and did for you. Everything I won, I won for you. It was a torture to me to see how blind you were, to feel still unworthy of tell-

ing you, to work on and fight on, in silence. And the night after you married Blessington Pell I walked around my place all night, with a loaded revolver on my desk. There were several things that kept me from that folly: it wasn't playing the game; it was certain to drag your sacred name into it. But more than all else it was because I knew how futile it was. I knew nothing so imponderable as death could end the agony of my love for you."

She was lying back against her pillow, all strength and speech stricken from her by this abrupt, this amazing revelation, yet conscious, too, within her prostration of a warmth of happiness.

Bentinck seemed to expect no reply from her.

"It is not because you are thinking or marrying Thomson that I have asked you to take Nikki away, that I have broken silence. And don't think, Anneke, it is because I have any hope that you will come to care for me. If there had been a chance of your loving me, you would have done so long ago—before you married; before you considered a second marriage. I could not rest under an accusation of a light lack of feeling. You will forgive me? And I do still ask you to think of what we were speaking of—of taking the child away. Please think of it. I—I find I cannot talk with you longer, Ann." His voice with its curious harshness broke. "I will come again soon." He left her still lying back against her pillow, still speechless, strengthless.

CHAPTER III.

"As a visitor, I was welcome," said Marley Thomson the next afternoon, presenting himself at the railed chair where sat Mrs. Pell. "You can't deny that Mrs. Joralemon said so herself."

Anneke laughed.

"My dear Marley, you are welcome as anything. I am in the dumps; I am

restless; I am cross-grained. I don't know what is the matter with me."

"Neither do I," said he, dropping into the divan near her. "If I were put through the third degree at this moment, I should maintain against all mental torture that I found you the most delightful of women, but that I had not the least idea what is the matter with you."

"You admit there is something?"

"Oh, everything," he complained. "You are engaged to me, and you treat me like the merest acquaintance. You are adorable and you are as cold as ice—colder. Your smile says yes, and your voice says no. Ann, where is your father? I want to talk to some one with a grain of sense. Though, as I wish to ask him for permission to address my proposal to my promised wife, I grant you I haven't anything sensible to say to him. Where is your preposterous parent?"

"Out," said she.

"And you are glad of it. How long is this nonsense going to last? I have proposed to you in England, Ireland, Wales, France, Switzerland, and Italy. I hereby propose to you again. What is your answer? I will and I won't. Thank you for nothing. How are you?"

"I am getting better," she smiled.

"Good." He looked at her a moment, and burst out laughing. "Now, my dear girl, you know that in six seconds more of these Dutch burgomasters' wives and families will be coming to call—by Heaven, there's one at the door now. And I thought you were an exclusive lot!"

"I told Cabot I was not receiving," said Mrs. Pell.

"He misunderstood you," groaned Thomson, rising, "for here he comes." He shaded his eyes with his hand in true, melodramatic style.

"You are in a ridiculous mood," she began when her voice suddenly died away.

"I beg your pardon, madame," said

Cabot. "Miss Pell is here. Francis is getting her luggage from the taxicab."

"Nikki!" cried she, rising to her feet in one swift motion of surprise. "Oh, send her right in!" She half turned to Marley as she went toward the door. "Just fancy! Why, she's days earlier than I expected. And what is the poor child doing in a taxi? To think she never telegraphed me; that I wasn't there to meet her!" Her lovely face was flushed, her eyes shining, and her lips parted in a smile.

There was a subdued disturbance in the hall, a drawling voice said something unintelligible to some one unseen, and then Nikki lounged into the room. She was wrapped like a barber pole in a striped fur coat that seemed designed to swathe her head somewhat to the exposure of her gayly clad legs, and a wild turban, that was drawn completely over one eye, swung a long, fantastic tassel of jewels down over her bosom. She was pretty enough even in this absurd costume to have dispensed with other bids for attention, but she was made up with rouge and powder and khol to an extent more usually associated with the dressing room of a theater. She carried under her arm a Pekingese, which she did not put down, but stretched out her left hand to meet her mother's and be drawn to a maternal kiss.

"Hello!" she said. "I've turned up ahead of schedule, haven't I? I may as well tell you I've been expelled. That brutal old cat would be telegraphing the good news to Goody Bentineck, anyway." She kissed her mother and left a trace of rouge upon those perfect, silent lips. Her eyes behind their beaded lashes turned on Marley, and she smiled. "How-de-do? Mother"—their hands still clasped one another—"you might introduce your suitor." She dropped the little dog gently, and with a slouching shrug freed herself from her wraps. "Don't look so shocked, mother. It's not being done. I'm dying for a ciga-

rette. You're not, by any chance, having a cocktail?" She picked up a cigarette, thrust it into her mouth, turning instinctively to Marley Thomson to have it lighted, and the rest of her speech was somewhat blurred by her first vigorous puffs of smoke. "It wasn't much, mother—only this time we got caught. We were playing strip poker in my room, and I'll put it as delicately as I can to you by saying that I had lost my entire stake." She laughed, and dropped into a big chair, tossing one fancifully clad foot over the other. "I didn't care. I was leaving anyway."

It was curious that the only thing that made this apparition, which she had touched and felt and heard, real to Anneke Pell was Thomson's spontaneous and unsurprised laughter. If her drawing-room had been suddenly invaded by a grass-green giraffe, and it had been casually accepted by her visitor as a natural household pet, the moment could not have held any wilder sense of delirium. She stood with the stillness of a woman turned to stone. But Marley, shaking the flame from the match he held, was utterly unconscious of her amazement.

"We are not having cocktails," he was saying, "and, if we were, youngsters like you should not get one away from me. You don't need them, and they are too rare to be thrown away on any but the deserving poor."

Nikki pulled off her toque and dropped it on the floor like a child getting rid of a wet mitten. Her revealed head was not cropped, but her dark, straight hair was brushed as flat as any man's, drawn back and upward, with two crescent curls pasted against her cheek bones, and this coiffure, with her shaven, lifted brows, gave her an almost comic look of frozen astonishment—a surprise, be it said, with no suggestion of sincere interest. Yet there was a perverse charm about it, this sleek, well-shaped head painted like a wooden doll,

the inhuman red of its mouth repeated in the long eardrops that hung down on either side like pendant sticks of sealing wax.

"No lamentations," she assured him. "I never want to see another. They've given me a rotten feeling, like being overdrawn at the bank. But then I don't suppose I've ever had a good one. We make gin in a mason jar with bits of poison from the druggist. Mother, I've asked my companion in crime and two Princeton men for bridge to-night. Mind?"

Mrs. Pell's good sense and her long social training combined to suppress the scream or the sob or whatever it was struggling in her throat as she said gently:

"That's very nice." She was about to move back to her place on the divan when Cabot, again at the door, forestalled her.

"Mr. Bentinck on the telephone, madame."

The very sound of the name brought a quieting breath to her bosom.

"You'll excuse me——" She went past Cabot like a woman in a dream.

"That's Goody Bentinck," drawled Nikki. "You know him? Frosty but sincere. I know that feline principal has telegraphed him that I'm returned with thanks. Rejection of material implies no lack of merit."

Meanwhile Bentinck was saying over the wire:

"I hope you won't think me presumptuous. . . . You won't? My dear girl. Well, it's a time for tact and silence; you don't need my advice, but I need to give it. Forgive me. She has come? . . . Well, do nothing. Say nothing. Between us later we will watch the rose bloom. Perhaps—you dear, poor girl perhaps you've an inkling of what I meant? Really I thought she might be there, and I wanted to give you a chance to catch yourself. . . . Oh, no, I'm not, May I come in to-night? . . . I tell you,

Anneke, I am not alarmed about you. You'll manage superbly. But I do hope Mrs. Joralemon—well, you know. A word to the unwise is often so dangerous. Don't let her fly out at poor Nikki. Tact and silence. Well, God bless you."

Mrs. Pell came back to sit in the great divan. She took up one of her cigarettes, and Marley again produced his matches, oblivious of the little silver lamp burning on the now-present tea wagon. The very difference in the way she handled it, lightly, aloofly, with a delicacy of technique, contrasted as powerfully as they themselves with her daughter's half-greedy, sophomoric, unfeminine manner. Nikki had kept up a jaunty conversation with Marley Thomson with all the aplomb of a demi-mondaine curiously mixed with a coltish clumsiness. The nightmare quality of the scene was still to Anneke their utter naturalness to one another, for Marley's unconsciousness that Nikki was in any degree other than he would have expected her daughter to be made him seem as strange as she. These two people with whom she should feel most at home seemed as incomprehensible as Martians.

"My revered grandmother at home?" inquired Nikki, without a shade of interest.

"She will be in any moment, I suppose," said Ann, with a sense of impending discomfort.

"Perhaps I'd better——" began Thomson, rising.

Nikki rolled her head around to look at him.

"You're afraid of her, eh?" she grinned. "Well, what can she do to you? She's only a female woman, after all."

"Still, I don't wish to——"

"Bet you a pair of socks you don't dare face her. My word, she'll not notice you. With me here in disgrace, I'll take all the edge off you. Stay and see the generations meet across the centur-

ies. You may not know it, Mr. Thomson, but, if Rip van Winkle had slept in this house, he would have found no changes when he woke. We'd go boating on Collect Pond, if they had not carelessly built the Tombs on top of it. Heigho! Well, mother, do we have tea, or do we wait—— Oh, my hat, my hat, my Sunday hat!"

She rose suddenly, stepped over her little dog, and moved with an indescribable, negroid shuffle toward the door.

"Listeners and compliments, you know, grandmother!" she cried airily, yet with an audible catch in her voice.

It was indeed Mrs. Joralemon, standing motionless in the doorway, with her hand on her page's shoulder. How many minutes she had been there, what her sharp Dutch eyes had seen in those few moments, they did not know. But no white shade on her daughter's cheek, no laugh of Thomson's, had escaped her, though she would seem to have paid attention to no one but her youngest descendant.

"Well, Nikki," she said quietly. As the girl took her outstretched hand she looked steadily into her face, looked at the rouge, the powder, the blue-black smudges around the eyes, the single hair line of the shaven brows. Not a flicker of change was to be seen in her expression, not even as she felt the trembling of the young brave shudder down her arm and shake her cold fingers. Nikki was frightened in the depths of her. But she had long ago made up her mind to withstand any interference by this "female woman" so long as flesh and blood of exceeding youthful vitality could hold out in rebellion. So she stood her ground, breast to breast with the family autocrat, and kept her beaded lashes level with a splendid effort. "You are looking exceedingly well," said Mrs. Joralemon gently.

Nikki caught at her breath. "I've been expelled," she said.

"You were to come home anyway,"

said her grandmother. "I hope you've broken no serious rules of the school."

"It was only silly; playing cards in my room."

"How do you do, Mr. Thomson?" said Mrs. Joralemon amiably. "Anneke, my dear, I shall be seriously offending against my regimen if I take tea with you every day!" She moved forward between her page and Nikki, and took her seat near the fire. She looked at them all in turn as she spoke. Her face was still and inscrutable. Anneke Pell with a sense of wonder remembered her ringing cry: "Not while I live and breathe!" She felt more at home with that angry mother than with this imperturbable social figure. In that stout little body, she knew, were seething hatreds of Thomson, Nikki, and herself; his position and pretension, Nikki's atrocious appearance, her own plans and projects. Yet there was not even a shade of annoyance on her fair old face, nor a quiver of so much as petulance in her voice. "What a nice little dog! Yours, Nikki? Let Gifford take him away while we have tea. They beg so irresistibly for things, and look so wistful, and paté is very bad for them, I'm sure. I see his paws are trimmed with monkey fur; so up-to-date! Well, Nikki. So you've come home. How nice that is. Your mother and I need a young person about, don't we, Anneke?"

"I fancy it means having a good many young persons about," said Mrs. Pell with a smile. "I don't feel old, mother," she added pleasantly.

"Well, of course not. Feeling old is merely feeling ill. But being young is a very different matter. It isn't always feeling young, by any means. Is it, Nikki?"

"Not by no tall," said Nikki, who had ceased to tremble, but still watched her grandmother warily.

"We will try to keep you feeling as young as your decrepitude permits," smiled Mrs. Peter. "Why shouldn't you

come out at once? There's no reason why you shouldn't have a dance to start with. I suppose you'd rather give it in the ballroom of the Carnarvon than here?"

"Mother!"

"Grandmother!"

The two voices rang out in very different notes of surprise, but Mrs. Joralemon took a very calm sip of her tea.

"Jazz, they call it. Extraordinary how slang expresses the changes in life! You dance, of course, Mr. Thomson? Anneke, the child will need clothes. Lots of nonsensical clothes. I'll give myself the pleasure of attending to it. Tomorrow, Nikki, we'll go shopping, shall we?" She laughed gently at the girl's rapturous face. "Don't be alarmed; Rip van Winkle shall have no hand in choosing them. I know the babies of to-day wear velvet lined with ermine. I shall get your mother and me a couple of suitable white tarlatans with pink wreaths. Not that we shall be dancing! Well, I must go now and rest."

Nikki whirled to her feet.

"Oh, do let me take you to the lift," she said. "Never mind Gifford. Do let me go up with you, grandmother!"

Mrs. Joralemon laid her little, dimpled hand on Nikki's shoulder as she rose.

"Well, come along," she said pleasantly.

"Now don't you wish," said Marley Thomson as the two withdrew together, "that your mother would take to me like that?"

Anneke Pell turned her eyes upon him, but it can hardly be said she saw him. Whatever she may have dreaded or expected on the meeting of Nikki and Mrs. Peter, it very certainly bore no resemblance to this astonishing scene. Apprehensive as she had been, she was more than ever conscious of a sense of unease, a bewildered feeling of discomfort, none the less unsettling for being far less comprehensible than her anticipation of a different trouble.

"Nikki is lovely," said Thomson idly, and quite unconscious of her inattention. "Dance—I should say so! I'll dance her off her feet."

CHAPTER IV.

Anneke Pell walked up and down in her own sitting room that evening waiting for Bentinck, too nervous to sit still, too absorbed in her anxiety to talk with him to remember that, otherwise, she might have felt some awkwardness in seeing him for the first time since his extraordinary moment of self-revelation. In her mother's rooms she had left her parents at their coffee; in another room Nikki was entertaining her friends, mercifully at a distance. All that she wanted to say to Christian confusedly rioted in her mind, but she had given up trying to think these things out in more orderly fashion. She could blurt them out as they came, and Bentinck would help her; somehow he would help her!

Somehow, indeed, he looked as if he could when he did come, self-possessed, good-humored, with no suggestion of a remnant of his lordship about him, an everlasting and dependable friend.

"Chris, I am terribly upset. I am all in a muddle. You will help me, won't you?" She met him with the words fairly tripping over one another. He took both her outstretched hands and held them firmly.

"Come and sit down." He drew her over to an easy chair and put her into it, switching off a light that shone too near it. He sat down beside her. "I heard sounds of revelry as I came in. Well, tell me."

Mrs. Pell had started upright.

"Chris, do you know what she has got on?" It can hardly be said that one atom of her natural reserve was left to her. "A black chiffon petticoat, and a thing—why, it's not a dress! It's a skirt, and it has a bib up the front that

fastens to a ruche around her neck. She's naked. She's dreadful."

Christian Bentinck certainly deserved her encomium for always doing the right thing by taking this very quietly.

"I've seen those dresses. Like the paper dolls, they have no backs."

"But she has!" cried Anneke, the tears checked in her eyes. "And mother! I don't understand it!"

"Ah!" said Bentinck. "What about your mother?"

"Why, Chris, she doesn't seem to mind!"

"Eh?" said he gravely. They regarded one another a moment in silence. "It's not possible her eyesight—"

She shook her head.

"Mother?" was her jeering comment.

"But then—" Bentinck got to his feet and took a turn up and down the room himself. Presently he came to a stand in front of her, and put the rest of his question to her: "Then what is she up to?"

"Well, I thought perhaps she wanted to win Nikki's friendship first. It was all I could think of."

He looked somberly at her.

"Anneke, I've been the intimate of this family all my life. My father was before me. We've been during two generations witness to many of your mother's successes. But that is not a method I ever knew her to adopt before. You remember your Uncle Hendrick?"

"Of course."

"Well, I mean you remember his affair?"

"I never knew much about it."

"Well," he said again, and sat down, "you may have supposed your father managed it, or that it died a natural death. But it didn't. Your mother murdered it."

"Chris! Really?"

"He was a weak, wambly critter, was Hendrick," went on Bentinck reminiscently. "Now Peter is crisp, adroit,

well-balanced, and all that. But even he has never swerved your mother from any course she mapped out. The reason he manages his money affairs, Ann, is because she lets him. She knows he is very capable. Oh, my dear, there's no use looking like that! I assure you, she lets him. Hendrick was horribly afraid of her. She kept him up to her standard, so to speak, by the hair of the head, with his feet way off the ground. Painful for Hendrick! When he got involved with this girl—she was a very nice girl, you know—your mother simply put him into your father's pocket, and sent them off to Canada to shoot something. I imagine she would have enjoyed letting off a rifle herself, like 'the man from Shropshire,' as a relief to her feelings. He would have married the girl, had she let him, and might have done it anyway when he got back. These weak-as-cambric-tea people do sometimes become very determined in short spasms. But, as you know, he got a chill and went off into double pneumonia and died. Your father, Anneke, was very remorseful. He tried to find the girl but never did. Your mother, Anneke, was sorry Hendrick died, of course. Beyond that, I can only say she seemed to feel the Almighty agreed with her that the marriage must be prevented. Well, it's a long way back to our muttons. But she never tried to win Hendrick's affection. Not she! I confess, I'm puzzled."

"But, Chris, isn't it just what you advised me to do?"

"To say nothing? To wait? To hope? Of course it is. But are these the tactics of Mrs. Peter du Rijj Joralemon?"

Anneke Pell was conscious of flushing deeply as she admitted that they were not. He noted the flush with no change of bearing. If he had, indeed, for the moment forgotten that she herself was considering a marriage that might not meet Mrs. Peter's approval,

there was no way of apologizing for having detailed an analogous case. There was only one thing to do: to drop Hendrick's phantom affairs.

"So much for that," said he. "What we are mainly concerned with is Nikki. I dare say, Ann, you could count on one hand the houses with young women in them where this sort of conversation is not, or has not been, going on."

"They are all——"

"It was my observation of the others that led me to give you the warning I did to-day. The Brinckerhoff later gave me the details of her leaving that establishment. But, I take it, your interest, like my own, is not so much in her having lost at strip poker as in her not seeming to have enough of a stake on her back at present."

His whimsical tone brought her the relief of a smile. But it was an evanescent thing at best.

"That and all the rest of it," she murmured.

"You see what I mean about taking her away?"

"But it's not what I want!" she wailed earnestly. "I don't want to have to take her away from it. I want her to be here, to be my daughter, to be part of my normal life. It's preposterous that I should have to wander around the world to keep her from vulgarity, immodesty, insanity."

"You don't see it as an interest in other things? Well, perhaps I'm wrong. But I clearly see that you are going down to defeat. I should say 'we,' for quite certainly I am going with you! What are your weapons, Ann? Discipline, or appeal, or resignation?"

"That, never!" she said, to the last. "Suppose I get her up here now to see you?" she hazarded.

"My dear, it's not a case for a doctor. I should like to see her, of course. But, if I were to prescribe, she'd not take the nasty medicine. You know that."

But it was something to do, and Mrs. Pell was very restless. She rang and they both remained walking about idly till Cabot appeared. On being told for what he was wanted, however, he explained his inability to acquaint Miss Nikki with her mother's desire for her fleeting presence with apologies to her guests.

"Miss Nikki and her friends have gone out, madame."

"Out?"

"The motor was kept waiting." It was clear that Cabot did not approve, either, and yet hard to say how his rigid facial expression conveyed any changing shade of meaning. "The motor that brought the young lady."

"Did my daughter leave no message? It's Miss Crane's motor. Have they gone to Miss Crane's?"

"They have gone, madame, to the Desert of Sahara."

Mrs. Pell looked momentarily stunned, with a dazed glance at Bentinck that seemed to say: "You who know about these extraordinary adolescents, do they go off casually to Gizeh when they've had enough bridge?"

"I know the place," said he quietly. "It's a—a restaurant."

Cabot without moving a muscle seemed to acquiesce in this, and to await further instructions with an indescribable effect of not expecting any and being about to go without.

Mrs. Pell had gone close to Bentinck, and was saying under her breath:

"No, Chris. I can't stand back and wait and hope, not at a moment like this. You'll go with me, and I'll stay with her, if she wants to stay. She can't go alone to a place like that. Cabot, get one of the cars for me. Louise will give you my cloak."

"Thank you, madame."

"Of course I'll go with you, Anneke."

"I suppose she won't like it, my coming to chaperon her?"

"My dear, it will never occur to her. She will think we came to dance."

The Sahara Desert was rather more crowded than its prototype, full of mirrors and electric lights and jazz and dancers. There were tables set in a huge parallelogram, and a red-satin orchestra at either end of the room, which caught up the pandemonic storm of sound alternately and kept it going without a moment's pause.

"We shall have to take a table, you know," said Bentinck. She suffered him to lead her in the wake of a head waiter, and saw him give that functionary ten dollars for a cover charge, without seeming to notice where they were. Her eyes scanned the vortex of dancers.

"They may not be here, you know," he said as her eyes turned from one couple to another. "The idea is to go to as many of these places as possible before breakfast. It requires a sad lack of imagination. When I get more accustomed to the fog—"

"What, Ann! You here, too? I've just been dancing with Nikki."

Marley Thomson's smooth black head bent down between them, and Anneke Pell was too astonished, and withal too preoccupied, to notice what any fox-trotting couple passing by could have told her, that these two suave gentlemen at her table hated one another with a simple directness that could have held its own among the head-hunters. She was unaware of any lack of cordiality in their antiphonal murmur as she mechanically introduced them. Her eyes were, after that one surprised look at Marley Thomson, on the dancers again.

"Is Nikki still here?" she heard herself asking.

"Was. Moment ago," replied Thomson, turning his head. "There she is, in that Deauville shawl arrangement. Over there."

Anneke thanked her stars for the Deauville shawl.

"I'll cut in, and fetch her, shall I? Or will you dance, Ann?"

"Oh, no, I won't dance," said Mrs. Pell. "Yes, I should like to speak to her."

"Now, Anneke," said Bentinck, leaning toward her as the other moved away, "what are you going to do? You see for yourself, you can't chaperon Nikki in a dance hall very well. Do you mean to go about and sit in the same Sahara with her every night?"

She turned her lovely, troubled eyes on him.

"Mr. Thomson doesn't seem to think it odd she should be here."

"Well, it isn't, when you look at it from their point of view."

"Their point——"

"Because they're all here. Every night. All night."

"Chris!"

"My dear girl, what is the use of saying 'Chris' in that tone, as if I had made a poor joke?" said he, with a touch of impatience. "What on earth have I to do with it? I wouldn't come to breathe this fat, choking air for any consideration except to be of service to you. But then I'm not of this generation. I like a lot of fun. I was born young. I couldn't endure this decrepit amusement. It's only fit for old men with monkeyized energy."

She saw he was talking at random to amuse her and she rewarded him by smiling.

"I don't know just what I am going to do," she said in answer to his question.

"You'll want to do it by yourselves, whatever it is. I'll say hello to Nikki and stroll off for a moment. Here she comes."

He rose as the girl whirled up to their table, and stood, after he had greeted her with admirable lightness. Thomson in his turn had been cut in on, and she had dismissed her last partner as she came to the table with a:

"Trundle on, Skiffy," as she sat down. Bentinck excused himself.

"Nikki, I don't like this place," said Ann gently. "I don't like your dancing in public halls unchaperoned. Won't you please try to see how unworthy it all is, how trashy, how common?"

"Snap out of it, mother," replied Nikki, without a shade of irritation.

"Nikki, dear, please! I've been looking forward so to our being together, and you know we all want you to have a good time. You can have all the dancing you want, and theater parties, and every sort of a good time. But this sort of thing, this atmosphere——"

"'Sth'matter with it?"

"Everything! It's not good enough, Nikki. It's cheap!"

"Well, it's cost me sixty dollars so far to-night," returned Miss Pell cheerfully. "But that saccharine beau of yours, mother, has a gift for spending his own rubles. These flask sippers assume that the female of the species is more solvent than the male. But since that big boy got caught in our machinery I haven't uttered a note. What did you come here for, mother?"

"I don't like your being here without me."

"Odd; I do." Nikki smiled. "You're top hole, mother. Ever so much more effective than I am. You're the kind that looks well even when traveling. You know—dark suit and small hat, and nothing more showy than a maid with a jewel case like a hall bedroom and a Russian sable rug. I always travel in color. Makes identification easy in case of accident. Now, I like this place. It's got lots of go, and the same with what you bring. You let Goody Bentinck take you home and give you a good hot cup of chocolate."

"Are you being rude to me, Nikki?"

"Not a bit. I like you, darling. I am not worthy of you, but I love you. I couldn't regret your being here more if I were your grandmother."

"Could I persuade you, or bribe you, to come with me, and let us talk it over to-morrow?"

"No, fair parent. I know all those moves. I'm amiable just now; a couple of cocktails always makes me so gentle a child could play with me. To-morrow, I shall be nervy and cross."

"Nikki, you must not take cocktails. You'll get fat and spoil your skin."

"Clever brute, my mother." Nikki wagged her head.

"I suppose you know, Nikki, that I could stop all this another way?" said Mrs. Pell quietly.

"Well, no, to tell you the truth, I don't know anything of the kind. Here comes Goody Bentinck. Go home and get your beauty sleep, mother." She rose, with her hands on her slender, velvet hips, standing in her vivid shawl as brilliantly colorful as a Zuloaga dancer.

"I don't want to leave you here."

"Angel, it can't be did. I'm not staying here. We're going from one joint to another. You know you can't trail me all night! 'Give you a sovereign, cabby, if you keep that brougham in sight,' and all that sort of thing. Now frankly, can you?"

"No, dear, I can't," said Mrs. Pell pleasantly. She rose and smiled at the girl she would fain have spanked. "We'll talk it over to-morrow, nerves and crossness and all."

"*Bien!*" said Nikki, sufficient to whose day was the triumph thereof. She flung a kiss to Bentinck and slipped into the outer edge of the dancers. A moment later she went shuffling by, gathered up closely to the lapels of Marley Thomson, who smiled and nodded as they passed. He was not stopping to chat with her and her escort, not he.

"They dance beautifully together, don't they, Chris? I'm glad he is here." She looked weary as she turned to him. "What a good friend you are! Well, I have done no harm. I have done no

good. Chris dear, there must be some way!"

"The world will class you with Edison, my dear, if you find it," he said so softly that she did not hear.

CHAPTER V.

Anneke Pell, going to her daughter's room next morning at eleven o'clock, and expecting to find her still in bed, opened the door and stood looking in upon ruin, chaos, and confusion. A new maid with a suspicion of tear stain about her eyes stood in the center of a wild waste of sumptuary gauds, and spoke with a catch in her voice.

"If you please, madame, Miss Pell gave me no orders."

Anneke came in and closed the door.

"What on earth has she been doing?"

"Doing, madame?"

Mrs. Pell made a gesture.

"With all—this?"

"Dressing, madame."

Mrs. Pell laughed and sat down.

"What is your name? Laura? Well, let us see first what it all is."

"Mrs. Joralemon sent at nine o'clock to say she wanted Miss Pell, and—and I haven't drawn a long breath since, madame." Laura smiled a little wanly, with much deference. "She took her bath, madame, and her breakfast at the same time, and I do assure you what I thought was soap in the tub was half a roll. Then she got everything out of the trunks, switch, switch, switch. What shall I do with it, madame? Is it to be packed again or put away?"

"Put it all away. Hang the street dresses in one closet with her coats, and the other dresses and negligees in there. Put all her stockings and shoes in that case where the slipper stool is; all her underclothes in the bureaus. You'll find it will straighten out as you go."

"Yes, madame."

Mrs. Pell rose and looked about her.

"I'm afraid you are going to have a

busy life with my daughter," she said kindly. "Mrs. Joralemon sent for her?"

"Yes, madame. They are going out together."

"Haven't gone yet?"

"I don't know, madame. Will Miss Pell dress for luncheon?"

"You mustn't get nervous about it," said Mrs. Pell.

"Oh, I won't," replied Laura more cheerfully.

Anneke went downstairs still in search of her daughter, and found traces of her passing in the needlework room. Here a cabinet stood open, and several long, slender wooden dolls dressed in bygone fashions lay in a pile on the floor. Cabot stood regarding them gravely.

"Your pardon, madame. I have rung for a maid to replace them."

"Why, Cabot, this is sacrilege, isn't it?"

"Something of the kind, madame." Cabot's face cleared under the influence of her presence much as Laura's had done. "Miss Nikki gave one scream when she saw them and had them all out in a winking. They've not been touched in many years. Very valuable, I believe, madame."

"I suppose they are. The ladies used to send them to Paris to have them dressed in models of the new fashions."

"Yes, madame, so I understand. Miss Nikki has gone out carrying her great-great-aunt in her wedding dress."

"Really? She's still a child, Cabot."

"Well, madame, they all do it, grown-ups as well as children. This last decade, Mrs. Pell, has confused a great many things. You can't tell the age of any one person by dress or actions."

Anneke Pell lingered a moment to see the fine ladies bestowed again in their racks, every fold in place, and every ringlet smoothed to jeweled comb or ribbon.

"Has my father gone out, Cabot?"

"Just going, madame. You will find him in the study."

And there she did find him, booted and spurred, as it were.

"Why, my dear," said he when she commented on his abstraction, "I find myself in rather a grumpy, frumpy mood, as Betsy Trotwood called it. Your mother began planning a ball before breakfast. I suppose I am growing old, Ann, but I've rather enjoyed these last two quiet years. You know I want Nikki to have the best of good times. But isn't she rather young for coming out? There isn't any hurry, surely. And why on earth your mother should rush out with her before the day had its eyes open to buy her a motor——"

"A motor!"

"Just so. Your mother—well, my dear, she is your mother—actually called up Mr. Thomson on the telephone, believe it or not; called him on the telephone and told him to meet them and see they were not cheated. Nikki was pirouetting in circles all around me at the time. And, as a matter of fact, it has not been a soothing morning."

Anneke frowned.

"I don't want Nikki to have a car."

"The message came too late," said Peter with a grimace. "She has got one now. She is probably learning to drive it. Your mother will buy her a rabbit skin to go her trouble hunting in, and I shall pay her fines. I offered to compromise on a chauffeur—cheaper in the end—but it seems it's not being done. And Nikki has already invented a bracelet with a red electric light so that she can hang her hand out the door. And so it went." He laughed ruefully. "I feel, my dear, as if somebody had lifted off the roof, and the winds of heaven were blasting havoc into my quiet study."

"It is a bit tempestuous," murmured Anneke.

"You and I are going to get blown up against the wall and held there until we starve to death, like the sheep in Arizona. That is inevitable. That I can understand. But your mother!"

Mrs. Pell turned her troubled eyes on him.

"That's what I can't understand, either. You know, Chris says——"

"Chris, eh? Well, it does me good just to hear his name. What does he say?"

"He wonders what she's up to."

"Up to? Humph!" He seemed to ruminate aloud. "Thinks it's a plot? Thinks she'll tire Nikki out with too much of it? No, that cock won't fight. There can't be enough of it for Nikki, let alone too much! Mrs. Peter is too shrewd to think it. Something else."

"But think! Do you know, I was terrified when I saw Nikki——"

"War paint is meant to terrify."

"No, no, silly. I was afraid of an explosion when mother saw her. Mother! Fancy! And Nikki with red and black and white all over her face."

"Well, in their respective places! You admit that?"

"And do you know what mother said? 'You are looking very well!'"

Peter pursed his lips and shook his head.

"Look you here, Ann. You get Chris in on this. We need him. I feel preternaturally inclined to lean heavily on a younger man."

But Christian Bentinck, as well as Peter and Mrs. Pell, could do no more than look on. For a week the shopping orgy continued, and the united tastes of Mrs. Joralemon and her granddaughter, which seemed never to conflict, selected an outfit that left nothing for that imaginative young person to desire. Every afternoon Marley Thomson went out with Nikki in her car, with the best good-nature, a patient teacher who declared his pupil to be a born motorist. In the evening, as often as not, he was included in the intrepid party of adventurers in the Sahara Desert, and to Anneke's bewilderment, for she had, perhaps, expected he would be little there under the displeasure of her

mother, he seemed continually in the house, going in and out as freely and casually as any member of the family. He was almost always there at luncheon, brought Nikki home and was asked to return to dinner, dropped in at odd hours, and never seemed unwelcome. But there was no effort made to disguise the fact that he was dancing attendance on Nikki, though he did so with the amiable inference that it was mainly to please Mrs. Pell.

"I'm going to be this young un's step-father, and I want her to like me, Ann," he said one evening when she lightly remonstrated with him for neglecting her.

"Of course. Don't pretend to me that you don't enjoy it all, however."

"Well, why don't you come, too? This pose of elderly lady is absurd in you. You won't stick in the house when we are married, I promise you!"

"I wonder," said she softly, sincerely.

"I suppose this chap Bentinck disapproves?" he said, and could have bitten out his tongue the next instant. Mrs. Pell seemed to become rigid, and the look in her eyes was combined of anger, surprise, and, worst of all, a fastidious distaste.

"I'm sorry, Ann. I beg your pardon, humbly. I really did not mean it."

Anneke Pell looked gravely at him, and, with a silent acceptance of his apology, turned away. Marley Thomson, contrite and uneasy, went off to find Nikki, in whose society it must be said he felt infinitely more at home.

In truth, the only person in the house who seemed quite tranquil was Mrs. Joralemon, who moved along the appointed way of her regimen, though canceling her usual occupations to attend to the details of Nikki's equipment, and who evaded all possible controversies with her husband or daughter with fine success. She set aside Anneke's objection to Nikki's motor, to the lavishness of Nikki's costuming, Peter's faint-

hearted demurring over the ball, without once revealing a reason for her own unexplained complaisance. But even this monumental calm was destined to be shattered.

It was Sunday, and luncheon time, though to Nikki, who had gone to bed at a round fat hour of the morning, it was breakfast and a reluctant one. The Joralemons and Mrs. Pell had been to church, and were correspondingly superior to one who was but just down.

"I say," said Nikki, who was giving up the struggle to find her bouillon palatable, "here's a funny thing. I saw a hostess woman last night at the Cadet Rouselle, who is the spit-and-image of that Du Rij female in the music room. She saw me staring at her, and came over to our table; thought something ailed us, I suppose. She was jolly about it, and showed me a new back step. I thought I could dance, but she makes me look like an amateur's marionette."

"Curious," said Peter idly. "Your great-great-aunt Katrina had rather a marked type of beauty. What was this person's name?"

"I think I'll take some dancing lessons of her. Name's Yarrow."

"Yarrow?" said Peter.

"Yarrow?" said Mrs. Joralemon, but no sound came from her lips. She encountered the fixed eyes of her husband across the table. Her hand went slowly to her throat. They remained so a moment, with faces of stone. Then Nikki saw her grandmother unaccountably begin to tremble. Peter rose and went around the table.

"What's the matter?" asked Nikki, her look flying to her mother opposite.

"Mother's not well," said Anneke. She motioned to Cabot. "A little glass of brandy," she said quietly.

"She'll be all right in a moment. Won't you, my dear?" Peter bent down and read the appeal in her eyes. "These little turn-ups come every now and then," he added, over his shoulder. "It

doesn't amount to anything. A little brandy—thank you, Cabot. Take this, my dear."

Mrs. Joralemon drank the brandy and sat back with a sigh.

"I'm sorry—I'm all right now. Sit down, Peter. Go on with your luncheon, my dears. It is nothing."

Nikki looked a little green and uneasy. She had all a child's terror of a faint. Anneke watched her mother, and saw her press her husband's hand in a very meaningful and determined way. Peter, apparently in obedience to the touch, went, somewhat reluctantly, back to his chair.

Cabot saw what the others did not, that Joralemon himself had a white look about him.

"You'd be the better for a little brandy, too, sir," he said, bringing it to his master's side. "It gave you quite a turn, sir."

"No, no, thank you. I'm all right. Nonsense."

"Well, this is ghastly!" broke in Nikki. "Here we all are frightened to death, and everybody trying to pretend there's nothing the matter!"

The protest brought a smile of relief to them all.

"Well, but it is over and past," said Mrs. Peter. "What were we talking about, anyway? Oh, your taking dancing lessons. I shouldn't think you needed any. What is a hostess woman?"

"Well, she's just sort of there, you know," replied Nikki. "I dare say she does introduce strangers sometimes, if they are lonely and want to meet some one to dance with. But mostly she just—gives a bit of tone, you know. Makes the place look a bit classy. General impression of social proprieties."

"And does this person"—Mrs. Joralemon stretched out her plump little hand and took a bit of toast which she painstakingly buttered—"does she give the impression of social proprieties?"

"Oh, she's much like them all. Eco-

nomical black evening gown, and marcelled hair. She gets her supper free; they all do. And enough to pay lodging, I fancy. She must have some sort of place to give lessons in."

"I suppose you know," said Mrs. Joralemon vaguely after a silence, "where this place is?"

"Gave me a card," assented Nikki nonchalantly.

"If, as you say," went on her grandmother after another pause, "she so oddly looks like 'the Du Riiij female,' I should like to see her. You may give me the card."

Peter rose from his chair like a man who could sit still no longer.

"I think, my dear," he said, "you'd better go and lie down a while. Do let me take you to your room."

"Well, Peter, as you wish," said Mrs. Joralemon, with unusual docility.

But when they reached the haven of her room she showed no intention of carrying out his suggestion.

"Shut the door, Peter," she said, and sat down in her favorite, low, billowy chair. "Peter, is it possible?"

He did her bidding and coming back stood looking down at her.

"How do you feel?"

"I'm all right now."

"You are a wonderful woman. I nearly fainted myself," said Peter. "Yarrow! Well"—he turned away and walked across the room—"Heaven knows. It may be a coincidence. But I feel it in my bones! I've always tried to lay that specter without success. It may have been a premonition that something was still to come of it. I never thought of this, though. Great Heaven, if there was a child——"

"She would be twenty-eight," said Mrs. Joralemon. "Anneke was nine when you went to Canada."

"Hendrick could not have known about——"

"Oh, Hendrick!" Mrs. Joralemon gave the impression of one who was

convinced that Hendrick had known little or nothing of anything.

"Do you make out—supposing it to be true—that she approached Nikki, knowing?"

Mrs. Joralemon pondered that a moment.

"Why should she wait for a chance encounter with Nikki? If she wanted to get in touch with us, if she had known that her father was Hendrick Joralemon, if she intended to make use of that knowledge, wouldn't she have done so long ago? She must have had what Nikki calls a thin time during these twenty-eight years, if the best she can do now is counterfeit the social proprieties at a place called the Cadet Rouselle."

"It's terrible to think of."

"Now, Peter," said she, authoritatively, "I won't have you tormenting yourself with your side of it. You are not in the least to blame if your brother had a child and we never knew of it. I won't have you rushing off to give her half your fortune, or any of the quixotic things you are capable of doing. You leave this to me."

"But, my dear——"

She silenced him with a gesture. He stood miserably, haggardly, regarding her.

"Just suppose she is not Hendrick's child at all. She may be a very unscrupulous adventuress. If you go and ask her if she is the daughter of Alice Yarrow, and all that sort of thing, putting a lot of dangerous facts in her hands, she may quite reasonably say yes, when she is nothing of the sort. You leave it to me."

"What do you intend to do?" he asked her.

"I shall go to see her at once. She is a dancing mistress and is approachable by any stranger. She gave her card to my granddaughter. I have come to see about the lessons. I do not allow my granddaughter to run in at

any chance address without investigation."

Joralemon could not forbear a grim smile.

"Do you not, indeed!"

"Don't be cynical, Peter. You asked me what I intended to do. Well, that is what I intend to do. From then on what I do depends on what I find out from her. You needn't look as if you doubted my being kind to her. It's my common sense that's hard, Peter, not my heart. And I shall come straight back and tell you, so you won't be kept in suspense. Whatever you do, don't tell any one yet—not Anneke; not even Christian Bentinck."

"And when are you going?"

"I am going now, this minute."

"Sunday?"

"Why not? They dance all day Sunday. The place will probably be full of people who cannot take lessons on any other day. Order the carriage for me, Peter, and ring for Euphemia. No, you are not going with me. I will take Gifford, of course."

CHAPTER VI.

Later that afternoon when the great doors of the great house swung open to readmit Mrs. Joralemon she paused, facing Cabot, and let her page take her sable coat.

"Visitors?" she asked.

"Mr. Bentinck is in the drawing-room with Mrs. Pell, madame. Mrs. van Suythen is just gone."

"Mr. Joralemon?"

"In the study, madame."

Mrs. Joralemon had only a moment's hesitation.

"Will you ask him to come to the drawing-room, Cabot? I am not at home to any one."

"Thank you, madame."

"And, Cabot, I shall dine in my room. I have had rather a fatiguing day."

There was but little evidence of it

about her, however, as she made her way through the spacious foyer toward the drawing-room. She greeted Anneke and Christian, and as she seated herself dismissed her page.

"There is no sense in my saying I hope I don't disturb you, like the dreadful people in books. As a matter of fact, I am prepared to disturb you mightily. However, as I am an old woman, I am not going to tell this story twice, and you must wait for Peter. If you had not been here, Christian, I should have sent for you. Anneke, you may give me some tea. And I will take it stronger than usual. Here is Peter. Peter, I am going to tell you all about it, and I want Christian to hear it, too."

Peter stopped, looking intently at her. And then came slowly forward.

"Yes, it's quite as you surmise. Anneke, your poor Uncle Hendrick had a posthumous child by Alice Yarrow, and she is the 'hostess woman' that Nikki was talking about at luncheon."

For several moments they sat in paralyzed silence. Then:

"She has proofs of this?" said Bentinck softly.

"My dear lawyer, I didn't need proofs. She had no more idea than had Nikki that she was related to us. And, if you could see her—Peter, she is Katrina du Riiij alive again. Well — Do close your mouth, Anneke; you look too ridiculous."

Anneke laughed.

"Mother, I can't help gasping when you take my breath away. Do let me have a little relaxation. Now I come to think of it, you nearly fainted at luncheon when Nikki spoke of this woman. Do go on."

"Well, I went to her studio. They all call their rooms studios. She was teaching a sandy man with pallid boots to behave like a receding wave. She excused herself, and we sat down on a thing that I know is her bed at night. I told her about my granddaughter

wanting to take lessons, and all that. And all the time I was trying not to call her Katrina. Not that I was born early enough to know Katrina, but the resemblance is really extraordinary. Well, I rose to go, and then I said quite casually that I used to know some people named Yarrow.

"I suppose she understood from my coming to look the place over that I was what she might call particular about things in general, and she may have said it on impulse. I don't know what made her say it. But she did say quite naturally, 'I suppose my name is not really Yarrow.'

"Now, do you know, I was positive from that moment. But I was not going to give anything away. So I merely looked puzzled and courteous, and asked her what she meant. She said: 'What I mean is that my mother's name was Yarrow—Alice Yarrow, like my own.' She looked straight on beyond me, as if she wasn't thinking whom she was talking to, nor as if she realized that she was talking at all. She said: 'She was a very wonderful woman; very brave. Luckily she had had sensible parents who had seen to it that she had a definite means of support; she was an expert accountant. But it must have been awfully hard for her to get on with a child to care for.' She seemed to remember then what had launched her into this confidence, for she looked at me and added, 'I never knew who my father was.'

"And I said, 'Well, I do, Miss Yarrow! What do you think of that, Mr. Lawyer?'

"Extremely ill-advised, and most uncharacteristic," said Bentinck, smiling.

"It is not likely that there were two Alice Yarrow's in the world who were expert accountants and had a girl-child twenty-eight years ago by a mysterious father who could pass on the face of Katrina du Rijj! No, I did not need proofs. We let the man with the blond

shoes go away, and we sat down to talk. It is pretty awful—though I liked what she said about her mother. But she might be worse."

"Mother, you really mean this has all happened? I can't believe my ears."

"Well, Peter can, and Chris. Can't you?" she turned to the two men.

Bentinck nodded, and Joralemon bent over with his head in his hands.

"Twenty-eight years!" he said softly.

"I am going to have a terrible time keeping Peter from getting sentimental," said Mrs. Joralemon. "He does so exaggerate things. This woman has come into a bit of luck that doesn't often fall to hostess women. Why not look at it that way?"

"You know, Bentinck, how I looked for her mother?"

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Mr. Joralemon."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Peter. "I reproach myself with having hoped and prayed that there was some other explanation of this, something other than what we feared. I reproach myself with wishing with all my heart that we had never heard, now at this late day, of the existence of this woman. What are we going to do with her?" he appealed to them.

"You need not give yourself a moment's uneasiness about it," said Mrs. Joralemon calmly. "I have arranged everything. I have arranged it so that it will never come undone."

"Tell us, mother," said Anneke, leaning forward.

Bentinck was conscious of listening as he had seldom done in his life. What had this amazing old autocrat done with this situation?

"Of course, there will have to be a settlement of money, but nothing extravagant or silly, Peter. I won't have it. Just about what you intended to give to Alice Yarrow, if you had found her. Why should you give more? Then I am going to bring her here."

"Here?" Everybody echoed this in a wild kind of cry.

"After Nikki's ball—on the Friday." Mrs. Joralemon vouchsafed them no more in answer than this with a very calm and level look. The look lingered on Bentinck.

"Would you have brought Alice Yarrow here?" he asked.

"Probably not. She was no kin of ours in any sense of the word."

"But, mother, is this wise? You will never get rid of her."

Mrs. Joralemon continued to look at Bentinck. Now she smiled as he suddenly lifted his head and met her eyes.

"You see, Chris knows better."

"Chris may understand you," said Peter miserably.

Bentinck was silent a moment, intent on his hostess' face. Then he turned a little toward Peter.

"Mrs. Joralemon is, as usual, up to something. She is a terrible woman."

"You do me no more than justice." was her serene response.

When she had gone away, leaning on her husband's arm, Bentinck moved from his place to sit beside Mrs. Pell.

"Well, for a quiet Sunday afternoon call! What an extraordinary thing!" he said.

"But how horrid, to have this Miss Yarrow here," mourned Anneke. "What will she be doing in this galère?"

"I fancy your mother knows, Ann," said Bentinck soothingly. "If you want to know what she will be doing in this galley, my opinion is she will be chained to an oar. Wait and see."

"You are not a bit more comprehensible than mother. But it is always a comfort to have you around."

Bentinck locked his hands together as he sat forward with his elbows on his knees.

"I have something to tell you which may alter that," he said. "Presently. In the meantime, what about Nikki?"

"And Miss Yarrow?"

"No, just Nikki. Nikki and her latchkey."

"She hardly needs one. Cabot is usually up when she gets home."

"Ann, you must not use the weapon of sarcasm against your child. It is a deadly sin. And have you given up hoping we can do something?"

"Against mother?"

"Your mother——" mused Bentinck.

"She has bought her an outfit like a trousseau; she gives her a lot of money to spend; she gave her a motor and got Mr. Thomson to teach her to drive it. None of these things seem intended to keep her at home."

He rose and took a short turn on the Persian rug whose pattern he seemed curiously to inspect.

"How should I interpret her to you? But I should be more at peace within myself, if I did not feel that I should, for my own sake, not interfere with her."

"Don't think to impose on me, Chris, with mysterious talk! You confessed in so many words the other night you did not know what she—to use your own phrase—was up to."

"Well, no more I do." Then he added darkly: "As an enemy, she would terrify me. As an ally, she freezes my blood."

"You make me feel like a moving shadow shape," complained Anneke.

"You are, my dear. You are nothing but a silhouette on a sheet. And the hands are the hands of your mother." He looked down at her, and then suddenly took her hands and drew her to her feet, holding her fingers cruelly in his. "Ann, I came to-day to tell you something. To tell you that it has changed everything for me, my having told you that I love you. Locked in me these years, the thing was strong and often angry, but it was safe. Now it will no longer lie down in its cage. Why should I without a protest let you go for a second time? If your happi-

ness means everything to me, how can I trust it to any one but myself? You see, you see how changed it is. I give you warning, Ann. I will not stay my hand till you are mine." He put her hands apart and took her into his arms. There was a hard brightness in his eyes that softened as he looked into her whitened face. "Don't be afraid, Ann. I am not going to force your kisses. I hold you so, for you to remember it. I will never let you go."

"My dear Chris," said Ann, with a brave catch at her breath, "I should not in the least mind giving you a kiss."

"It's the wrong kiss," he said gently. He held her still, looking down at her mouth. His face lightened with a whimsical smile. "It is, of course, very tempting, and a fool I may be to forgo it. But I told you not to be afraid, Ann. And—I couldn't stop with the wrong kiss."

CHAPTER VII.

Bentinck, in response to a call from Joralemon, early Monday forenoon went over to the Westervelt, and, passing the outer entrances of the impressive offices, followed the corridor to Peter's own private door. An ex-service man with an empty sleeve opened to him, stood aside with a brief smile to let him in, and shut himself out into the hallway, according to invariable procedure. The few who came to his door saw the great Joralemon alone, without even a close-mouthed veteran in the antechamber.

"Chris, I said to Ann the other day, that I wanted you to lean on," said Pete. "Sit down. I little thought then I'd be asking you to go with me to see my brother's child. What a thing life is!"

"Your stars are certainly going through some remarkable evolutions," smiled Bentinck. "You've no more doubt than has Mrs. Joralemon about all this?"

"Oh, none. I——" He rose and went to the window of the courtyard. "Chris, we were very much to blame, I think. I always felt it. Hendrick's marriage may not have been a wise project, but look at this! Look at this woman who can say: 'I never knew who my father was!' And think of that other woman, who was so brave, and was so luckily an expert accountant!" He made a miserable gesture. "I only hope my own account will be handled by a merciful juggler."

He turned to face the younger man. "You said yesterday I had nothing to reproach myself with, that I had searched for her. But I took him away to prevent his marriage, and, say what one will, no one but myself is responsible for his child's namelessness."

Bentinck went to him, and laid a hand on his arm. His ever-abundant respect for Joralemon was the greater, in that he could so utterly blame himself and forget the imperious will that had sent him and his brother away.

"You're too harsh with yourself, sir. You'd never have done it, you know, if you'd known how the land lay. You're going to see her?"

"And I want you to come with me."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

"Now it is," said Bentinck, and turned to pick up his hat.

"You're a good sturdy one to lean on, Chris," said Peter getting into his coat. "I'm getting old. Why don't these unsettling things come while a man has youth to bear 'em?"

"Oh, they do. But one doesn't notice."

"Well, I should have had a son, and I wish you were he," grumbled Joralemon.

Bentinck's humorous mouth smiled in its grave way.

"It is one of my lesser ambitions," said he so lightly that the other gave the words no meaning.

Miss Yarrow received them in her studio, and Bentinck noticed with amusement that her costume added a final touch to Joralemon's apparent nervousness. She was clad in a white Greek drapery, bound across the breasts with gold ribbands, and hanging in folds to her ankles. Her small feet were bare.

"I've just finished a class," she said composedly. "If you will excuse me?" She thrust her feet into a pair of straw sandals before she stepped off the dancing cloth, and swung a wrap about her. "It's none too warm in barns. One doesn't notice it, dancing. Will you sit down?"

"I'm Peter Joralemon," said Peter who was looking curiously at her. "This is my friend, Mr. Bentinck, Miss Yarrow. He and his father before him have always been our stand-by."

Miss Yarrow looked from one to the other.

"Won't you sit down?" she said again.

Peter moved to a seat and seemed frozen by an inconvenient silence. Bentinck quietly filled in the blank by saying:

"The world is dance mad, Miss Yarrow?"

"A good thing," was her downright judgment. "Keeps people from fossilizing." She turned her fantastically familiar face to the other. "You didn't come to talk about dancing."

"Not at all," said Peter idiotically. "I—you are really remarkably like Katrina du Riiij!"

"Mrs. Joralemon said so. Am I to be glad of it?"

"She was considered very handsome," said poor Peter.

"Prrrt!" She disposed of this promptly. "I didn't mean that. The resemblance led to your finding out about me. Am I to be glad of that?"

"I—I hope so."

"You haven't come to tell me anything disagreeable?"

"But certainly not. I came—I—my dear young lady, I am your uncle!"

"Well, no, you're not," she remarked calmly. "You're my father's brother, you know. Mr. Bentinck, I am sure, is a lawyer, and he will tell you that you are not my uncle."

"I can certainly assure you, Miss Yarrow, that Mr. Joralemon is determined to be nothing less."

"Thank you, Chris, thank you," said Peter, taking courage.

Miss Yarrow made a brief movement with her hand.

"I don't see any need for embarrassment," she said. "There is no doubt, apparently, that Hendrick Joralemon was my father. He died a rich man, I dare say. How much are you going to give me of what was his?"

Under the shock of this question, Peter opened his miserable lips but gave utterance to nothing.

"Mrs. Joralemon discussed this matter with you?" asked Bentinck, without turning a hair.

"She set no definite amount."

"At the time of your father's death," went on Bentinck, "we made every effort to find your mother. Mr. Joralemon and my father settled upon an income they hoped to induce her to accept—six thousand a year."

"That would have ceased with her death?" mused Miss Yarrow. "She died when I was ten years old."

"You must remember that we did not know about you," said Bentinck a little less elaborately.

"I don't forget. Are you offering me six thousand a year? It's not as much as it was twenty-eight years ago."

"You would need more?"

She looked at him in some astonishment.

"I want all I can get, of course," she said. "Why doesn't Mr. Joralemon speak for himself?"

"Yes, yes," assented Peter, on whose forehead stood a dew that the tempera-

ture of the room certainly did not warrant. "Of course you shall have more than that. Very natural, very reasonable——"

"Suppose we say," put in Bentinck, "if you will excuse me, Mr. Joralemon, suppose we say ten thousand?"

"You are his lawyer? Well, suppose we do. Then there is"—she frowned a moment—"one hundred and sixty-eight thousand of back payments, which would have been either my mother's or mine."

"Twenty-eight times six," muttered Joralemon.

"And interest, perhaps?"

"Well, I don't quite see that," demurred Bentinck, somewhat appalled at the tone. "You would have had a flat income."

"He's had the interest," she pointed out dispassionately. "About ten thousand."

"For Heaven's sake, Chris," said Peter in a hoarse voice, "let be, let be. Call it two hundred thousand."

She turned her eyes wonderingly upon him.

"Whatever is the matter with the man?"

Bentinck controlled an impulse to express his personal sentiments.

"I fancy Mr. Joralemon is made uncomfortable by the general tone of our conversation. He didn't come to discuss financial matters. He came to—to welcome you."

"Nothing could be more welcome to me than two hundred thousand dollars," she said without exaggeration.

"If you could look on the matter a little less as a business proposition, you would be more kind."

"Well, I am surely a little less than kin," she said with a sudden merciless wit. "I am sorry if you thought me disagreeable. I didn't intend that in the least. Business is business. Why not talk about it? I suppose you are not used to women who do. But it's

over. I'll take that and the ten thousand a year." She turned again to Peter. "Your wife seems to want to take me to your house," she said kindly, if with an extraordinary taste.

"Of course," assented Peter. "My dear, we hope you——" He floundered and cast an appealing look at Bentinck. "You must really try to think of us as—as your people—your relatives——" He essayed a pitiful, though kindly smile.

"But I can't be there as your niece, can I? What could you tell your friends?"

"I haven't thought of it." He gazed at her desperately. "But—but you are my dead brother's child—my child, my dear. Don't you—I can tell you so much about him—don't you want to hear it?"

"Why, yes," she said slowly. "I see how it looks to you. It's come suddenly to you. But you see I've had all my life to think of it. Of him, I mean. And I fancy I haven't a very high opinion of him. He must have been rather a poor sort to be put off like that from what he wanted, just because it didn't suit your plans."

"I was very fond of him," said Joralemon sincerely. His trepidation was for the moment steadied by his earnestness. "I should like to make you believe that your welcome is no matter of words with me."

"I'm not a sentimental woman," said Miss Yarrow patiently. "You are a complete stranger to me, and I can't pretend that I feel differently toward you than I do toward Mr. Bentinck, for example. You are both very charming, well-dressed gentlemen. But either of you might be my father's brother, so far as I am concerned."

Peter rose and held out his hand with a grave smile.

"I hope we can change that," he said. "Good-by, my dear. Mr. Bentinck will send you a check to-day. Come, Chris."

CHAPTER VIII.

"What I don't understand," said Marley Thomson, "is how you can give a ball." It was the evening of that event, and he had come early to see Ann, being one of thirty invited to dine before the dance. Mrs. Pell, radiant in silver brocade, had just accepted his graceful compliment on her appearance, and was still standing before his admiring gaze.

"Well, you see," she said, mocking in reassurance, "we've done it before."

"I don't mean that," said Thomson. "But can there be enough people who can pass through your fine mesh? I thought there were only a half-dozen families worthy to be noticed by Madame du Riiij Joralemon."

"Oh, we go to extremes when we give a ball," laughed Anneke. "It's a matter of *débutantes*, you know. They will all be there, and their brothers and their lovers and their mothers——"

"And their sisters and their cousins and their aunts. Will they come after being ignored at more exclusive affairs?"

"You'll see," said Ann. "There will be seven hundred couples for you to bump into, more or less. Mother will come about midnight. But I shall have to stay for breakfast."

"Well, you have certainly put on a most becoming diamond breakfast cap," he laughed. "Is it fair so utterly to eclipse the deb?"

"Wait till you see mother," said Mrs. Pell. "Nikki and I will be together in the shade."

They both contributed to this vain chatter with idle tones, but both were curiously ill at ease. Nothing seemed to disconcert them quite so much as to catch each other's glance. It seemed as if behind their eyes two strangers sought surreptitious glimpses of the unknown. Brief silences that had once befallen them quite comfortably in the past became insupportable, as if a word-

less moment held some pregnant meaning, some distressing connotation. It was as if they feared the eloquence of every pause.

"Nikki," said Thomson desperately, "could very well sit in the shade of the flowers she has received."

"It's been appalling," said Ann. "Tons of them have gone already to the hospitals. The ballroom at the Carnarvon can hold no more, and one steps on them here. Cabot says it is like a funeral."

"Cabot has the face for it, that's one comfort. You must bear up, Ann. Remember how these great sorrows are healed by Time's tender hand."

Anneke laughed, glad to find refuge in his absurdity.

"Anneke," said Peter from the doorway—he came in smiling—"here comes your mother. Would you mind putting your arm around me? I find these two years have weakened me for facing her in full regalia."

Both Thomson and Ann rose laughing, and turned toward the doorway.

"Look at her," said Peter, in a faint voice.

Mrs. Peter was dressed in gold-backed black velvet, that glowed like molten metal in the heavy folds of lusterless black. Her ever-smooth shoulders showed but briefly between her lace sleeves and the wide swathe of her deep, diamond collar. Links of diamonds hung in varying lengths down below her waist, and her small, exquisite head was held regally under a diadem of blazing stones. She looked like an empress of legend and sorcery.

"My word!" breathed Thomson, in a gasp.

"Very impressive, am I not?" she queried kindly. "And here"—she put one hand behind her—"here is my climax."

As she spoke, she drew Nikki forward from the curtains to stand beside her.

"You darlings!" said Mrs. Pell in one glad cry. For Nikki was clothed in crisp and colorless tulle, without one sequin of adornment. Not a buckle, not a ribbon, not a rose, not a single pearl, no jot or tittle of elaboration. But from the delicate dress she seemed to flower upward in a perfection of fine-drawn, youthful beauty, her quaint, dark cap of hair as if pushed back to show there was no blemish in all her radiant transcendence.

"Rather obvious, though—no?" said Nikki. "I fancy it has been done before. Only on me, I admit, the thing's a shock. Never mind, you've made me a child again just for to-night. Tomorrow I shall make up—in more ways than one. Mr. Thomson shall take me to dinner. And I shall wear a nose ring."

"Done!" said Marley. "I'll get you one. It will be a great convenience to a manly escort."

She made a face at him, but had no time to retort upon him, for, Cabot appearing in the doorway, she moved forward to stand at her mother's side, saying softly:

"Mrs. Pell, the mother of the *débutante*, was unostentatiously dressed in platinum——"

"Mr. and Mrs. Carolus Brevoort," said Cabot. "Mr. Ter Haar; Mr. Cortlandt-Sheafe." His voice continued to sound monotonously at intervals, through the laughter and chatter of the incoming guests. "Mrs. Schermerhorn; the Misses Schermerhorn; Mr. van Hooft; Miss Christie; Miss Roosevelt; Mr. Bentineck; Mr. and Mrs. Ten Kate; Mr. Hofdijk van Kuiper."

"With a slight slurring of the sound," said Marley, sotto voce, smiling as Peter Joralemon turned to present him to a guest, "you can introduce me as Merely Thomson."

Three times only that night were he and Anneke Pell forced to continue their curiously difficult conversation—

difficult even in the atmosphere of pageantry and jubilation that protected them from those overshadowing pauses they found so disconcerting. She gave him two dances only, pleading her duties, and they sat at the same table at the second supper. But he himself lost count of the times he danced with Nikki, and the two continued in their camaraderie, as comfortable as an old shoe. Until during an early morning fox trot he unwisely warned her that champagne was not good for children, when she gracefully bent her head and set swift, sharp teeth in the hand that held her own. She was sorry a moment after.

Mercifully the gusty blare of the music drowned his furious and trenchant word. Then slowly he tightened his fingers till her bones ground together. His eyes glared down at her.

"You'll pay me for that, young un," he said intently. It was a highly colored moment. But in the general whirl and racket it escaped attention.

"Don't think it," snapped Nikki. "I live on credit."

"You'll pay," he repeated. The surge of anger that had swept him left him with quickened pulses. He drew her more closely to him, and lost his head. "You'll pay me in kisses," he said and put his burning cheek against her face.

He could hear her breath come shifting through her lips. A moment, and her slim body seemed to weaken and sink a little in his arms.

"Well, then," she murmured, "I will pay."

Another moment and she was gone, a room's length away from him, with a new partner. Thomson, shaken and half surly, slipped away for a cigarette to steady his nerves.

"Little demon," he said to himself. His heart was beating unsteadily. "Woof!" said he. "This will never do." And was not pleased to find himself face to face with Christian Bentineck,

whose remarkably level gaze was faintly amused, faintly contemptuous.

By five o'clock, however, when breakfast was served, and everybody was amazing his neighbor by eating sausages, and not surprising anybody by preferring champagne to coffee, Thomson was serene again. He treated Nikki with gingerly unconcern, and took Anneke Pell to her car.

"You look as fresh as a lilac," he said. "How is it done? I am at the point of collapse."

"However I may look, my spirit is as empty as a gourd. I have spoken my last word until six o'clock to-night."

Nikki cast herself into a place beside her mother.

"Three and a half pairs of slippers," she remarked wearily, and put her head into her mother's lap.

"You are now in society, Nikki," said Thomson. "The morning papers, telling what you haven't yet taken off, have been on the streets these hours." He laughed and closed the door upon them.

"This is Wednesday," said Nikki as she woke when the car stopped before Joralemon house.

"This is Wednesday," said Mrs. Peter, sitting up in bed with her breakfast tray a-straddle of her knees. "Where's Miss Pigeon?"

Miss Pigeon, it appeared, was waiting. She came in, a little, spectacled woman in a straight blue serge. She gave Mrs. Joralemon her letters.

"Miss Pigeon, I've neglected a great many things these last few weeks. How many do you make it?"

"Well, I hadn't—"

"I want a full list. And telephone where you must for appointments for Friday."

"A full list! But—"

"I'll take all day Friday and, say, Saturday morning. What are my regulars?"

Miss Pigeon, stared at her, coughed,

and consulted one of several books she carried.

"Your regulars are: Friday, meeting of the Altar Guild, monthly meeting of the East Side Owners Association, and the meeting of the committee on funds for the hospital circulating library. This Friday you have a visit to the De Ruyter ward in the city infirmary, and a meeting for the Christmas plans at the Junior Refuge. You usually send a check, but do not go."

"I shall go," said Mrs. Joralemon, "check and all. Can you squeeze in anything more? Something quite plummy."

Miss Pigeon looked vaguely alarmed, and consulted another book.

"There's the matter of the right of way through the land you set aside for the children's playground. You'd be down near the office."

"Excellent," said Mrs. Joralemon. "And Saturday?"

"Saturday is the rummage sale, the meeting of the directors of the National Orchestral Society, and Miss Ter Haar's at home."

"Excellenter and excellenter!" said Mrs. Peter. "Will you ring for Euphemia to take my tray? Give me a careful program, and put in any suggestions for empty half hours."

"But you never in the world can—"

"Peace, Pigeon, peace," said her mistress serenely. "Make me comfortable, and read these letters. I'm sure I don't want to. Anything in the newspapers?"

"Four columns about the ball—"

"Oh, that!" Mrs. Peter settled cosily into her pillows again. "That is ancient history. I was there. You might take the motor and escort my diamonds back into the vault. My family will sleep all day, so I shall not get up yet. Anything gloomier than the aftermath of reveling I never experienced."

Gloom was, perhaps, a strong word for it, yet Anneke Pell was conscious of a general unsatisfactoriness in the

atmosphere when she came down in the afternoon, and yet she was too incisive an analyst not to know that there was more unsettlement in herself than mere fatigue and relaxation could account for. She wandered into her father's library, and found him having a solitary dish of tea in front of a homely coal fire.

"I'm all at odds and ends," he said. "Grumpy again. I haven't been myself for days—weeks."

"I came in to be cured of the same complaint," said she. "Will you give me a cup of your brew?" She settled herself comfortably.

"Allow me," said Peter. "There's one thing about that ball for which I am grateful: nobody will call on us for days!"

"Blissful!" sighed Ann.

"If I ever hear another oboe, or smell another rose, or eat another lobster sandwich——" He sat down again near her, with a little laugh, but a keen, sidewise look. "Let's have an old-fashioned crack together. I am all in a muddle. There's so much going on. Nikki—and now this dreadful thing about Hendrick's girl. You were always such a good one to talk to. With you on one side and Chris on the other, I can lean heavily."

"Lean on, Macduff," she said compassionately.

"Well, Nikki, now. Seriously, Ann, I don't like it. Playing ducks and drakes with herself; cocktails, and rouge pots, and staying out all night! What's to be done?"

"Well, what, Peter? Chris wants me to take her to the other end of the world. Perhaps he thinks that ancient temples and old bones would make a craving for culture. But I know exactly what would happen. Nikki would be dancing all night in Knossos; she would have cocktails in the shadow of Boro-budoor; she would be motoring up the sides of the Acropolis."

"But what's got into them?" cried Peter.

"I don't know that," said Anneke Pell slowly. "But I think what is more horrible is that there's nothing to be got out of them."

"By Jove!" said Peter in a hushed voice.

"They are wasters by trade, stupid, destructive, unfruitful."

Peter lay back in his great chair to consider it.

"Perhaps they've been given the job of ridding the world of 'em," said he. "But, hang it, Ann, we don't want Nikki in that lot!"

"No. But they seem to be at it all over the world. Wherever I took Nikki, she would find the same environment. So much for Chris. For myself, short of using force, whips, police, and dungeon cells, I see myself powerless. Mother may have seen it all at one look and stood aside."

"Your mother doesn't stand aside. Look how she stepped straight into this matter of Miss Yarrow! Do you realize, Anneke, that in two days she will be here? What did she do that for?"

"Let's ask her," suggested Mrs. Pell. "She'll never tell. But I think Chris knows."

"Chris!" echoed Anneke.

Peter became grumpy again.

"Why on earth Chris wasn't born a Joralemon I don't know. Did it just to spite me, I dare say. Oh, heaven, Ann, when it was settled that you were coming back, I used to sit here and think how happy I was going to be; how happy we all were going to be. I saw you making everything sparkle again, and Nikki being young and sweet, and your mother and myself prosing around, glad to have you two girls in our home, and Chris ambling in with that humorous elegance of his—a sort of continuous last-half-hour-of-dinner feeling," he mused.

Ann rose with a little laugh and put

her arms around his neck, standing behind his chair.

"Instead of which, as the man said in the story, 'my boots pinch, I lost a quarter, and somebody stole my umbrella last year.' It's too bad, Peter. Let's go out and take a walk and whistle up our courage."

He put his hands up to hers, and was silent a moment. Then very hesitatingly he said: "You're happy, Ann?"

She laid her cheek down on the top of his head and did not answer.

"I think, my dear," said Peter after a moment, "I think you are the greatest trouble of them all."

CHAPTER IX.

Friday morning saw Mrs. Peter up and dressed and demurely alert at an early hour. Miss Pigeon, with faint expostulations, gave her her ivory tablets filled with appointments; Euphemia buttoned her gloves; Gifford stood by in a fur-collared uniform; Cabot was at the door; and outside waited her well-warmed brougham.

"I really feel," said Mrs. Peter with a laugh, "like a crusader being got up in armor for the fray."

"You'll overdo," fussed Miss Pigeon.

"I'll have you abed on my hands," grumbled Euphemia.

Gifford rarely spoke, but in his pale eyes wavered the conviction that he should have turned informer and given her plans away to Mr. Joralemon.

She soothed none of them, put aside their half-detaining hands, and went away superior to qualms. She drove first to the studio, and sent the page up to tell Miss Yarrow she was waiting, though, indeed, she waited but a few moments.

"You are prompt," she approved, smiling, when Miss Yarrow joined her, and noted in one glance the results of Peter's first check. "I begin my day early, because there is so much to do,

and I do sometimes have to rest a little between the morning and the evening."

"You ought to spare yourself, then. Why not train other people to do for you? Are you shopping?"

"No, no. Just my regular duties. I've never been willing to let others handle these matters, but I can't do as much as I used to. And I have been thinking how wonderfully you could help me. Nikki's too young, and my daughter, Mrs. Pell, has quite as much as I to do. You've got a good business head, I'm sure."

Miss Yarrow said somewhat reluctantly that she supposed she had. It had not been her intention to continue to use it, however. She quite felt that it had earned a permanent vacation. But even her downright habit did not perceive how this was to be conveyed to her hostess in the first few moments of their intercourse. Moreover, the chances were that very little of her energy and acumen would be required to dispose of what this stout little luxurian would consider a hard day's work.

She had a day of revelation before her.

The ten o'clock meeting of the Altar Guild disposed of, Mrs. Joralemon took her to the offices of the East Side Owners Association, where a long and tedious business meeting bored her beyond belief. Even an outcrop of acrimonious argument, resulting in the secretary's proffering his resignation, brought her none of the pleasurable gratification she saw on the faces of the others. She went on to the committee on funds for the hospital circulating library in a weary apathy that only the feel of the chinchilla collar of her breitschwanz coat against her cheek could mitigate.

About half-past one, Mrs. Joralemon was congratulating themselves that they would be a little early for her visit to the De Ruyter ward in the city infirmary, "because of the dressings inspection," as she expressed it, and being

early could undoubtedly get some one to give them tea and a biscuit in the nurses' dining room. And in this barrack they did indulge in this attenuated substitute for luncheon.

Mrs. Joralemon's visit to her ward was no perfunctory matter, it appeared. She knew the names of every old patient, their afflictions and their family cares, and she discussed them exhaustively. The new patients had not a secret left when she finished with them. For all that, she was a bracing and beneficent influence and she dictated to Miss Yarrow's pencil memoranda of ten thousand errands she undertook for the sick, with the consolatory comment that they would find plenty of time to attend to them the following day, a day already well provided with missions.

This over, the brougham took a further plunge into the less-savory parts of the city, and Miss Yarrow was introduced to the refuge for children of wage-earning mothers. This foundation elastically included a lot of children whose mothers might have been wage-earners, had they been able to find work, or had not taken to drink, or had not died, and there was very much more to be done than to decide on how many Christmas candies a child might find allotted to its share.

"I've not been nearly so active here as I should be," said Mrs. Peter, with severe self-reproof. "But, with you to help me, I shall do better hereafter. And now that we're down in this part of town, I must go to see the commissioner about that playground. There's an old right of way across it, and we want to put up a wire fence on account of the balls. - It can be done with gates, I'm sure, opened once every Lady Day, or something done with giving four barley corns to the mayor at Michaelmas. It's pretty late, but he's expecting me, and I won't have a moment to spare to-morrow."

Miss Yarrow sat exhausted in her

corner of the carriage as they took their slow, creeping way uptown.

"You like this sort of thing?" she asked finally.

"Well, I never stopped to think of that," said Mrs. Peter quite cheerfully. "It's part of administering a large fortune, you know. We've always done our duty and a bit more. It's a family pride with us. Of course, it's all new to you, but you'll find a great interest in it as you go on."

She hospitably accompanied her guest to her suite of rooms when they reached the house, and saw to it that her trunks had been unpacked and everything made comfortable.

"I've had to give you one of the housemaids till we can get you something better. I'm afraid she doesn't understand hiardressing, but I can lend you Euphemia. You see, I've had Katrina brought up and hung in your boudoir. Come and look at her."

"I saw her," said Miss Yarrow. "For a minute I thought it was a looking-glass."

"Extraordinary, isn't it? Well, dinner at eight. Only the family and few of those. Mrs. Pell and her daughter are dining out."

"I've never been in a house like this before," said Miss Yarrow. "Do you wear low neck for dinner?" She asked the question without the faintest trace of embarrassment.

Mrs. Peter escaped soon after and sought Euphemia.

"What on earth would one wear to dinner but a dinner frock?" she demanded absently. "Put me into a deep tub of hot water, and give me a cup of hot milk, and let me die."

Euphemia foretold, as she undressed her, that, of course, she would be blamed by Mr. Joralemon for letting her overdo.

"I've caught up on all my duties and I shall die shriven," said Mrs. Peter contentedly. "You can rub me with alcohol. I am going down to dinner."

"And faint away!"

"Faint heart ne'er bounced fair lady," replied her mistress with a wry smile.

Dinner, to Peter Joralemon's amazement, was very long and infinitely dull. If he had expected any feeling of oddity to overtake him in sitting down to dine with Hendrick's daughter, he was disappointed, or the sensation was overwhelmed in the remarkably prosy conversation of his wife. Dinner at this house was usually short, and Mrs. Joralemon was usually to the point. But to-night Cabot and his footmen moved about the table with interminable ceremonies, and during the protracted boredom Mrs. Peter at intervals let fall such maundering ineptitudes as prostrated his wits. He found Miss Yarrow languid, and very obviously making an effort not to yawn. As usual, he wished for Bentinck. After dinner he found himself, to his unmitigated horror, escorting them to a rendition of old English Christmas ballads, sung in the Children's Theater by the high-school choristers.

He uttered no protest, allowed not one word of his hopeless bewilderment to escape him, but Mrs. Peter had much to do to keep from laughing every time she caught his appealing and puzzled eyes.

At home, as they all went up together in the lift she said good night to Miss Yarrow very prettily, reminded her to remember what she dreamed in a strange bed as it was said to come true, and announced that she would take her out the following morning about eleven.

"That's the rummage sale for the Armenian babies, you know," she said, partly, it would seem, to her husband. "Really, I don't know if it wouldn't be nice if Alice took a table. Only there's the meeting of the directors of the National Orchestral—are you going, Peter?—and one or two at homes. We'll have luncheon at the Ladies' Exchange. It's near by."

Peter followed her determinedly into

her room and was surprised to find that Euphemia expected him.

"It's no use coming to me about it, Mr. Joralemon," said that elderly martyr sourly. "I do believe Mrs. Joralemon is not herself. Such goings on I never did see. Miss Nikki must have bewitched her, I must say. I've got the aromatic ammonia by the bed, and the doctor's number fresh written on the telephone pad, and I'll not close my eyes this night."

Peter thought he suddenly understood his adored wife's remarkably inane contribution to recent events.

"You're tired out," he said, irrationally cheered by the explanation. "I'll not stop a moment. Get her to bed, Euphemia, and let me know early to-morrow how she is."

"Peter," said Mrs. Joralemon, bidding in his arms a moment, "Peter dear, I do think a nice man is the nicest thing in God's good world." She kissed him and patted his cheek with her lovely little hand. And he would have gone away thoroughly reassured, had she not then given a sudden dire chuckle as she turned away.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Joralemon continued to be the only person in the house who seemed quite tranquil. Nikki, who, at least in her meteoric fashion of bolting across their firmament, had hitherto given no evidence of disturbance other than that it was her pleasure to create, electrified her mother by bursting into passionate tears before them all one evening—hot tears she utterly refused to explain—and was henceforth one of the self-tormented. So absorbed was she in her secret trouble that she evinced no slightest interest in the extraordinary developments in the affairs of her dancing mistress.

Peter was frankly miserable; Anneke more reserved but undeniably ill at ease;

Miss Yarrow restless and moody. Even their two visitors, Bentinck and Thomson, who were so much there as to be part of the household, seemed to Peter in no better case.

Instead of there being any amelioration in the general tone of gloomy dissatisfaction, it appeared to accumulate like compound interest. It went from vague unrest, through an ever-increasing crescendo of distress, perplexity, grievance, disquiet, depression, until, with a frank bang of a futile book on the floor of his study, Peter rose with the virile conviction that it was no longer to be borne.

Christian Bentinck, who sat with him, tossed his cigarette into the fire and stood up.

"Somebody got to do something?" he suggested.

"Something—something," cried Peter in a sort of subdued yell, "has got to be done, certainly."

"I think," said Miss Yarrow at the door at this dramatic moment, "I am going to do it. May I come in?"

Bentinck turned his own chair for her acceptance, with a smile, and moved toward the door.

"I don't mind your staying," said Miss Yarrow.

He made a gesture that disposed of his inconsiderable worthlessness, and went away.

"I can't stick it," said Miss Yarrow without preamble, facing Peter, however, with a cheerful poise. "I've always had a tough time, and I thought I knew all about hard work. But I've been lapped in rose leaves compared to my life here. I am simply and unutterably worn out. Your wife is a human dynamo. I'm not, apparently. I can stand on end and dance till my dress goes out of style, but the fatigue of living up to wealth and position is beyond my endurance. I'm going to take my income in a shawl strap on board the slowest steamer that crosses the Atlantic,

and rest. You've been awfully good to me, and I'll never forget you. But I hope I never see another Joralemon as long as I live."

"My dear——" said Peter helplessly.

"Don't bother," said Miss Yarrow. "I'll be one perplexity the less. The maid is packing my things, and I'm going to mouch around the house and say good-by to people as I find them. I don't want the full staff of domestics lined up in the hall to see me go, or whatever is your baronial custom. I want to slip out, and get into a cheap taxi with 'twenty cents' painted all over its yellow face, and go sit by the subway stairs and watch the leisure of the rush hour. I want a little peace and quiet!" She gave a short, sharp laugh, relieved to have got it over. Then, with an unexpected touch of affection, she patted his shoulder, said good-by, and hurried out.

However she may have known they were there, she went straight to the morning room where she entered without ceremony, finding Nikki face down in the pillows of a chaise longue, and Marley Thomson stonily glaring out of window. On the table lay tossed their motoring gear.

"Look here!" said Alice Yarrow. "Nikki, sit up and powder your nose. Do you want to do the most sensible thing you ever did?"

"No," said Nikki.

"Prrrt!" was Miss Yarrow's characteristic comment. "Mr. Thomson, take this child down to city hall, and get a license to marry her."

Nikki sat up abruptly, her mouth open. She had not been crying but her cheeks were blazing scarlet. Marley Thomson's stoniness seemed to have spread to his extremities.

"Yes, I know you are engaged to her mother. It's all nonsense. You are not run in that mold, Mr. Thomson. I might say you're not good enough for her, but you'll be very good for Nikki.

You two are just cut out for each other. You could never live up to Mrs. Pell. I can't, and I have got sense enough to get out. I'm going somewhere where I can be comfortable. And I advise you to do the same. Here—put on your things, Nikki." She caught up the girl's fur toque and, with a dexterous roughness, pulled it down over her head. Nikki began suddenly to laugh, and two big tears rolled down her face.

"I wish I was dead," she growled. "Oh, don't. Oh, don't. I can't do that." Two more tears rolled down. "Boy, dear, you know I can't!"

"Hoots!" said Alice Yarrow. "Put your coat on, Mr. Thomson. Stand up, Nikki. I want to take the good news you've actually gone. You don't fit in, either. Why, you don't think you're breaking anybody's heart, do you? Your mother is head over ears in love with that lawyer man. I don't blame her. I'd be in love with him myself, if I ever got one of those slow smiles he gives her. You idiots! You donkeys! I don't know how grown people can get themselves into such fixes."

"Mother!" gasped Nikki. "Mother and Chris!"

"Why, they're sick with love!" cried Alice Yarrow.

"Boy, dear!" Nikki looked at him one instant and went crashing into his arms. "Do you believe it?"

"He knows it," declared Miss Yarrow. "Don't you?"

"I think," said Marley Thomson, "you may be right." He held Nikki with her little nose crushed against his chest.

"So, that's all right. Now, off with you. If you know any State within motoring distance where you can get married right off the bat, step on the gas. Good luck! Good-by!"

She blew them a kissing smile and left them. Her last glimpse of them showed Marley buttoning Nikki's fur coat under her chin with some difficulty

as he industriously kissed her face. Nikki was crying with a light heart.

Miss Yarrow made her way next to the drawing-room, where Bentinck and Anneke sat happily talking about George Eliot.

"I've said good-by to everybody now, but you and Mrs. Joralemon," she said, coming as ever directly to the point.

"You're not going away?"

"Yes, I am," said Alice Yarrow. "You've been ever so kind to me, and you are awfully charming people. But I can't stand you."

Anneke laughed.

"What's the matter with us?" she asked agreeably.

"You are all too diabolically reckless," she returned. "For the fun of playing according to your hair-splitting rules, you juggle with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I think the trouble with you is that you never let yourselves be simple."

"I recently," said Bentinck, "have been guilty of the greatest candor and plain speaking."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Miss Yarrow. "It does you credit. But I'll wager it was an effort."

"I have been forty years nerving myself to discard my birthright of repression."

"You see!" She made a gesture with her big, white hands. "I'm glad you succeeded. When you want a thing grab it. Run, if you must, but run with it in your hand. I've just given the same advice to Nikki and Mr. Thomson."

"Nikki and——" gasped Anneke.

"They grabbed and ran," said Alice Yarrow. "They are now, as the drama says, 'beyond pursuit.' The poor child thought you really wanted to marry the creature. She's desperately in love, and so's he. It will be an ideal match."

"As you remarked, Anneke, they dance beautifully together," murmured Bentinck.

Miss Yarrow turned on him. "Now, do drop it," she said with quiet force. "Stop philandering around the edges of things. Why shouldn't you be naturally surprised and delighted? Why not say something real?"

Anneke Pell had risen and gone to the hearth, where she stood looking into the fire with an intent yet absent look.

"You'll not be angry with me, Mrs. Pell, for giving us all a breath of air in this house? I'm going now. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Ann, turning quickly with a smile.

"Good-by," said Bentinck. "Since you must go, it gives me an early opportunity to follow your advice. The moment the door has closed upon you, I shall say something intensely real!"

She nodded brightly.

"Now for Mrs. Peter!" she said, and vanished.

But at the threshold of Mrs. Joralemon's room, she surprised herself by coming to a dead stop. Something inside her throat ached for a swift stab, and her eyes smarted. She went in slowly.

"Mrs. Joralemon!" she called softly.

A voice answered her from the inner room.

"I'm lying down. Come in."

Mrs. Joralemon was lying on her great tester bed, lifted high on lace pillows and comfortably covered by a soft chuddar shawl. Miss Yarrow came rather slowly toward her, and knew she had no need to announce her errand. Mrs. Peter's sharp eyes had seen the unspoken good-by on her lips.

There was a stool beside the bed on which Miss Yarrow sat down, and after a moment leaned her head against the incredible feather silkiness of the shawl. It may or may not have surprised her when Mrs. Peter put a gentle hand on her hair; she made no sign.

"You've taken an awful lot of trouble," said Alice Yarrow, "but you

are great fun. You fooled me completely, Mrs. Peter."

"Yes?" The voice was as light as the hand on her hair.

"Of course, you're quite right. I wouldn't do here at all. It was wonderful of you to see just how you could prevent my ever having any haunting doubts whether I shouldn't like to live here. You don't know how glad I'll be to get away, you dear thing."

Mrs. Peter gave a little chuckle.

"I confess the high-school choristers nearly finished me," she said.

"You know," said Miss Yarrow, "I'm only left-handedly a highbourn, but there are a lot of things in you like a lot of things in me. We're real, you and I. And what we want, we grab. Of course, you do it gracefully."

"Yes, you've more Du Rij in you than Katrina's face. You shall have the portrait, Alice. With an ancestress like that to point to, you can snap your fingers at the lack of a producible family."

"She'll be a valuable asset," agreed Alice Yarrow. "I wanted to stay and see you finish your play with the others. But then I suddenly saw I was one of the marionettes, not one of the audience. So I snapped my string."

"I hope it hurt a little."

"It did—and does."

"I've grown fond of you, Alice."

"Yes, there's a queer thing! Well, you see we're real. We can talk without epigrams—but only to one another. You'll miss me there."

"I dare say I shall," said Mrs. Peter. "I'm an old woman, and sometimes I like just to be good, like this, and let who will be clever."

"I'm afraid I robbed you, though. I stole the climax of your drama."

"Well, tell me that," said Mrs. Peter comfortably.

"You were doing beautifully. But they were all being high-souled. Perhaps except that Bentinck man—he's got at least a streak of reality. He only

needed a little, little push. They wanted to grab, but, you see, it wasn't a well-bred gesture."

"I see. You think I got them as far as I could?"

"Oh, wonderfully. But then they needed me."

"How nice it all is! I hope you are going ever so far away."

"As far as far can be."

"And leave us all happy."

"Oh, well, I'm taking myself happy, too. I'm even happy to get away from you and your touch on my hair." She

was motionless a moment and then turned her head, gave the lightest of mere touching kisses to the gentle hand, and rose to her feet, smiling down at the fair old face that looked so kindly up at her.

"You don't even wonder why I threw Nikki at the head of a man I wouldn't have my daughter marry?"

Miss Yarrow shook her head.

"Oh, Nikki is not too good for him. And"—she smiled, looking more like Katrina du Rii than ever—"she is only a Pell, when all is said and done!"



STRANGE laws find their way into the statute books, especially in new regions of the country. Los Angeles is having a legal house cleaning of such laws as one barring drivers of horse cars from shooting jack rabbits from the car platforms; another which forbids a mother to bathe more than one baby in the same tub at the same time; and a third preventing the wearing of false whiskers in the street.



A GENUINE Titian, which experts have identified as "The Madonna, Holy Child, and Titian's daughter Lavinia," thought to have been lost in a fire in Madrid, has been sold for \$100,000 by an artist who owned it for thirty-three years without suspecting its value. The artist bought it for one hundred and fifty dollars at an auction in Florence, while studying there many years ago.



THE "Who's Who" of royalty, the "Almanach de Gotha," has ceased to exist for lack of princely material. For years it has chronicled the births, marriages, deaths, and throne changes of monarchs, but there are few monarchs in need of its services now. The stern arbiter of princely rank, it refused its pages to all but the truly royal. Even Napoleon had to threaten force before he was admitted to its pages. The "Almanach" has been called the graveyard of dethroned kings; for even if their kingdoms fell, their history remained in the volume. But the World War destroyed even that last resting place of monarchical pride.



WHATEVER other nations may boast, Persia owns the most valuable of thrones, the peacock throne, once valued at thirty million dollars. It looks much like a bed and is entirely covered with a plating of gold which, according to Lord Curzon, who is one of the privileged few who have seen it, "is beautifully chiseled and enameled and absolutely incrustated with precious stones, rubies and emeralds predominating. The lofty back, which is one mass of gems, rises to a center wheepon is fixed a circular star of diamonds with scintillating rays, made to revolve by a piece of mechanism at the back. On either side of the star are two bejeweled birds perched on the edges of the back frame and facing each other." The present value of the throne can only be conjectured as important pieces have disappeared.



Hibiscus Red

By

Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Author of "Painkiller"



IT takes all kinds of people to make a world, according to the platitudes, and the same thing, in proportion, to make a winter resort. I suppose, from Atlantic City to Havana you can find them all—nice people, newly rich people, distinguished people, flashy people, literary people, athletic people, and silly people. But the only Ada Jeremy was at Miami Beach.

Of course, Theodore was there, too. You noticed him afterward. When the society reporters headed the list of guests at some particularly elaborate dinner dance they wrote: "Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Jeremy." But it was Ada Jeremy you thought of, and Ada Jeremy you looked for, first.

If she came—and she might or she might not, just as it pleased her—it required no great amount of looking to see her immediately. She was as vivid, as omnipresent, as those flaunting bushes of red hibiscus which you see everywhere south of Palm Beach; great, blazing, red-satin flowers, stuck like pins in a pincushion on their thick, green bushes. They are the first flowers you see, and the most popular. Ada

Jeremy had something of that quality. She was one of those women whose entrance is never a simple coming into a room, but an event, a spectacle. It was the atmosphere of tense, zestful living she carried with her, which made everything she did, even the most trivial, somehow dramatic. At the most crowded formal ball of the season you had the feeling that no one was there until she came.

I remember seeing her make such an entrance in the slack middle of a costume ball at the Casino. It was an elaborate enough affair, with columns about it in the papers for days in advance, costumes by special designers, and enough heartburnings connected with its invitation list to create a greater havoc than the flu. Yet in the middle of the night after the costumes had been thoroughly assimilated the thing slumped, in spite of the excellent orchestra. That is the trouble with costume balls. So much excitement and imagination in their preparation, so much of that easily aroused feeling, which women especially have, that this, at last, will be the great transforming

occasion of their lives, that even the best of them come to the dead center when every one realizes that it is only another dance, after all. At that moment Ada Jeremy came in.

She stood looking at the swirling floorful of dancers, the Persian dancing girls, the pirates, the Chinese mandarins, the mah jong characters, the special costumes with special glitters of gold and silver cloth, the towering head-dresses and silk tights that might represent almost anything, and it was as if a little flutter of reawakened gayety thrilled through everybody. "There's Ada Jeremy now," people said, and heads turned in her direction, and the thrill ran through the room again until it seemed as if they were all reinvested with that happy sense of living in drama.

She had not troubled to dress especially, that night. Her impish, ivory face, with the two wings of smoky, black hair drawn straight about it, the red flower of her mouth, that was at once insulting and caressing, guileless and reserved, the eyes that were like warm, dark amber except when they were narrowed and incalculable, had no other enhancement than a straight little Chinese suit of heavy white silk, straight tunic with a high collar and long sleeves, and white trousers. It made her look as she could look when she chose, like a Manchu aristocrat set down among incongruities. The great cloak of hibiscus-red taffeta, which billowed from her shoulders, made her one with all this again, made her flauntingly complete, made her Ada Jeremy.

Five or six men in ordinary evening clothes, and Theodore somewhere in the background, of course, made additional setting. But it was the vivid drama of her which brought that sense of romance back to the dance floor, as she brought it everywhere. She threw the great, red cloak at some one, and danced out on the floor with some one

else, and a turning of heads and rising tempo of laughter moved about her as she whirled lazily. The costume ball was a great success, everybody said, and it was well known that three eligible new men, who ought to have been swallowed up by the débutantes, had quite lost their heads about Ada.

Of course, people talked about her. Some went so far as to call her out and out bad. People gossiped about her ruthlessness, her insolent use of social power, which no one quite knew how she acquired, her daring, her string of male followers, and her husband's invisible means of support. In a locality where every one came from somewhere else, the Jeremys appeared from nowhere, mentioning no backgrounds, boasting of no Northern, Western, or European connections, simply taking, through Ada Jeremy's superb aplomb, the center of the stage. But it is to be remarked that the very people, who commented upon her most acidly, did not fail to bow graciously when she passed, driving the smart, plum-colored sedan that Monty Evans had given her, or riding the horses so obviously from Charlie Frothingham's extravagant stables. And, as to the Sunday tea dances, very small and very, very hand picked, the dinners, equally small and equally smart, which she gave in the compact, sophisticated stucco house which there were rumors about their acquiring, why, everybody intrigued hotly for invitations. It mattered nothing to her at all that people said she was only a subtle Mrs. Broderick. It mattered nothing at all to her that many people could not see the difference between the morals of Ada Jeremy and those of Mrs. Broderick. They learned that difference, well enough, by the affair of Grahame Eustis.

About Mrs. Broderick there was no possibility of question. People knew she was bad, and spoke openly of several notorious examples of it. Yet

she had more money, obviously, than the Jeremys, and went about everywhere with her particular train. At hotels, at polo games, at tea dances, Mrs. Broderick's tall, blond insolence was shoulder to shoulder with Ada Jeremy's smart gayety, and her elaborate costumes were eagerly noted by unsophisticated society reporters. That was how she was able to obtain a sort of prestige with the guileless. But, if there was any doubt in the minds of the intelligent, her reputation was thoroughly established by her most unsavory treatment of Grahame Eustis.

He must have looked like ready money to Mrs. Broderick. A mild, well-mannered, retiring sort of boy, he was none of your much-advertised hard-boiled younger generation. That kind would have given Mrs. Broderick her proper label at once. But Grahame had been studious, secluded by one religious uncle until rescued by another and prodigal one, who sent him South with plenty of money and only the haziest idea in the world what he should do there. So when Mrs. Broderick, in crushed raspberry chiffon, cut him out of the herd at a coconut grove dance in Palm Beach, and proceeded leisurely to put her initials on him, it was almost the due procession of the inevitable. He was hopelessly entangled with her, and reduced to slavery as one of the least of aspirants for her florid smiles, when she returned to Miami Beach, trailing Grahame and four or five others after her. And Mrs. Broderick's train was not good company for studious boys. They reduced him financially while she reduced him emotionally, until he was merely the wreck of a nice boy, white-faced and red-eyed from too much gambling, too much drinking, and too much bad company. Mrs. Broderick's methods were heavy-handed in the extreme. She kept him in subjection by keeping him as busy as a chauffeur or a bootlegger

on intricate, tawdry affairs of her own, never letting him finish a sentence or a dance, always expectant of romance always withdrawn. No, he was not a boy of great character or insight, but then you must remember that better men than he have fallen for the Mrs. Brodericks.

I doubt if Ada Jeremy would have noticed either Mrs. Broderick or the boy, or have been concerned by it, if it had not been for an occurrence on that very night of the costume ball. The person to whom she tossed the great taffeta cloak of that hibiscus red, which set off her slim, Chinese whiteness so stunningly, was not one of her own beaux, but Grahame Eustis. He was waiting disconsolately for Mrs. Broderick to finish, with some new pick-up, a dance she had promised him, and it was quite natural for Ada to think he was one of her own. He looked like any number of slim, blond, well-groomed, mild youths she knew. So Grahame caught it, awkward with surprise, and stood, his arms overflowing with billows of that dramatic red, which gave out a crisp perfume of cinnamon pinks and some underlying, exotic odor that went straight to his head, and stayed there. His rather tired eyes followed Ada Jeremy around the dance floor once, and then the music stopped and she came back for her cloak.

Mrs. Broderick came back, also, caparisoned as an Egyptian princess of the Ziegfeld dynasty, with yellow silk tights, and chains of imitation topaz, and a vast peacock headdress. She looked—well, she looked formidable. And she bore down upon Grahame and his armful of red on one side just as Ada Jeremy approached on the other. The wrath of Mrs. Broderick broke three feet away.

"What are you doing, holding that woman's cloak?" she boomed, and the miserable Grahame saw people's heads turning and grew pink. But Ada Jere-

my's cheeks were as ivory, her amber glance as warm and direct, as if no Mrs. Broderick existed.

It goes without saying that she would not have bothered with Grahame, if she had come upon him alone, holding her cloak. She would have smiled and thanked him and forgotten instantly. There was a Cuban general who had learned his manners in Spain, and a fascinating new millionaire from California, for her to play with. But Mrs. Broderick did the trick.

Ada merely slipped a warm hand on Grahame's arm, smiled delicately and wistfully, and murmured:

"Have I kept you waiting so very long? Do come now! I have so much to tell you."

And Mrs. Broderick, a dull beet color, watched them move toward the doors which gave on the beach promenade, Ada Jeremy looking clinging and absorbed, and Grahame looking, it must be confessed, perfectly bewildered.

Even then Ada might have let him go, if it had not been for the look in his eyes. He had the expression of a starving man lost in a desert, who suddenly sees an oasis which may be a mirage. After all, he realized vaguely, Mrs. Broderick was not like this. Ada gazed at him, very much amused. Her impish face was lovely in the soft light. She looked friendly and intelligent and helpful, besides that.

"Well, what's your name, boy?" she said. "If I have robbed the cradle, I might as well know what it is called."

"I'm Grahame Eustis, Mrs. Jeremy." She was accustomed to everybody's knowing her name. They always did.

"Ho, that's how it is, is it?" she replied, and twinkled up at him. "Then, I guess I know all about you, too. Are you having a good time?" She knew perfectly well he wasn't.

"Oh, yes, thanks. Delightful. Miami Beach is an amusing place, don't you think?"

He was game, anyway, she considered. But, of course, it was none of her business. The Cuban general was standing in the doorway, gazing reproachfully. Then Grahame said in a burst of confidence:

"But you know, I miss a good deal down here. People don't seem to find interesting things to talk about, do you know what I mean? Books and—well, ideas."

"What sort of books?" she asked.

He actually flushed.

"Well, you know, before I came down here I was rereading some old things of my uncle's. Charles Reade and Trollope and Wilkie Collins, and, you know, I think——"

"You like Charles Reade?" Her gaze came back to his abruptly, vividly. "Do you remember the place in 'It's Never Too Late to Mend,' where—— Oh, come along, we might as well dance this." And she bore him off under the very nose of the Cuban general. It was thoroughly like her unexpectedness that she danced six dances with him, full under the glowering eyes of Mrs. Broderick, and any number of disapproving critics of her own conduct. It was characteristic of her, also, to be genuinely absorbed in talking about forgotten novels, modern essays, and inconspicuous minor poets, whom very few people there present might have heard of. She said Grahame was very intelligent and amusing, and I am sure she meant it. She asked him to tea the next day, and he went back to his hotel immediately after, not bothering his head about Mrs. Broderick.

Immediately the gossip ran like a brush fire around the beach. Ada Jeremy had captured that dreadful Mrs. Broderick's youngest suitor. People who had never received an invitation to the Jeremys' were quick to say that it just showed in what class Ada Jeremy belonged. Only Grahame was oblivious, although suddenly conscious

that life was, after all, rich and vivid and exciting. Ada Jeremy had accomplished that effect of heightened romantic values, as usual, immediately.

The change for Grahame really did seem miraculous. The long, cool Jeremy living room was made to welcome him at any time. There were actually books in it, shelves upon shelves of worn books, a delightful, haphazard conglomeration of Somerset Maughams and Kiplings and Anatole Frances, Arthur Machens, and Stevensons, and Arnold Bennetts. When Ada came upon him there, browsing, she could talk about them sparkingly. She could talk, too, about plays and jewels and early American walnut, as well as bridge and poker, and popular detective stories. Here, also, Mrs. Broderick was hopelessly outclassed. The result on Grahame was immediately evident. His pallor gave way to a nice, sunny mahogany, and he began to put on weight. But, of course, Mrs. Broderick circulated a spiteful rumor that Theodore had actually forbidden him the house.

What Theodore Jeremy thought about what Ada did, in this and other matters, not Mrs. Broderick nor anybody else really knew. Theodore was so quiet, everybody felt that maybe he did not think at all. Somebody once even tried to call him, "Mr. Ada Jeremy," but, somehow, it could not be done. There was something too solid about Theodore for all that. He stood a little over six feet and his bones were well cushioned. He had ordinary grayish eyes and sandy hair, and a sandy mustache, and never said anything you could remember. Yet he was likable, in a mild sort of way. He played average polo, rode nonchalantly well, swam well, played a good game of golf, and good, dependable bridge. Nothing startling, nothing extraordinary, about Theodore. Only Ada. So, naturally, he came and went very much in the manner of an

old friend of the family among the shifting hordes of Ada's rich and dashing playmates.

Grahame hardly noticed Theodore at all until the moment when he found he was desperately in love with Ada. That momentous event happened the fourth day after Ada had rescued him from Mrs. Broderick. It was at tea in her patio, and she had just given him his second cup, and he held it and gazed down into her eyes and knew he loved her. Enchantingly. Exhilaratingly. Desperately. He wanted to drop the cup and bury his head in the calm silk over her bosom, but, as there were twenty or so other people present, he could only choke himself with his tea, which was almost boiling, and retreat hurriedly to the long living room.

Here he found Theodore reading placidly a new book on auction, who got up and thumped him on the back and loaned him another handkerchief. So Grahame stayed and read himself to a sort of calm again, staring from time to time over his book at the oblivious Theodore. There was a black ribbon on Theodore's eyeglasses, and he wagged his foot as he read. Grahame simply could not understand how he could do it, when the most marvelous woman in the world was just outside pouring tea, a woman to make the brain reel and the tongue of man cleave to the roof of his mouth.

He wanted to snatch the book on auction away and shout: "Why do you sit there and read like that, stupid? Do you realize that at this moment I am in love—in love—with your wife?" He wondered, if he did, would Theodore try to kill him?

But, instead, he sat there and said nothing at all, and went back to his hotel early and stayed awake all night, thinking about love and Ada Jeremy. He realized then what an ass he had made of himself over that vulgar Mrs. Broderick, and blushed in the dark to

think of it. But, thank Heaven, his eyes were open at last. He grew hot and cold all over, wondering if he could hope that she might—could—would love him. Surely a divorce from that—that Theodore, would not be difficult.

They could never live on his allowance from his uncle, he decided at four o'clock in the morning. He would go to work. Work, for the husband of Ada Jeremy? No! With her, a man could aspire to a career. With her beside him—oh, how wonderful she was—the kingdoms of the world would lie before him. He would enter the diplomatic service. That was it. He fell asleep, presenting Ada Jeremy, as his wife, to the Queen of England. Or was he presenting the Queen of England to her? He was very vague about it and rose at eight to ride with her, pink-cheeked and refreshed and quite, quite mad.

For two weeks Ada Jeremy let him be seen with her constantly. He was too happy even to tell Ada what he thought about her, as if she, and everybody else, could not have read it in his expression. He basked in her heady presence as if it were the strong tropic sun, and she let him. Perhaps she wanted to make sure that his salvation from Mrs. Broderick was complete. Perhaps she did it because he amused her. It is perfectly conceivable that she liked him a lot and found his naïve devotion a welcome change. At any rate, for him, Heaven sent miraculous hours. The sea, when he swam after Ada's insolent red bathing suit to the darker green beyond the diving raft, was celestially warm, smooth, translucent jade. Evenings, when they danced, the orchestras were conducted by cherubim in disguise, and for Grahame the circle of watching faces were only pale blurs in an unregarded mist. When they dined out the people around him

were paragons of brilliance and all the food was Olympian ambrosia. You can see from that what a nice sort of young chap Grahame Eustis really was; romantic and a little foolish, of course, but quite thoroughly nice. People noticed that, too, but they said, really, Ada Jeremy's infatuation was going a bit too far.

Then, suddenly, everything changed. You could hardly expect Ada Jeremy to maintain a purely philanthropic interest in one mild-mannered blond boy for longer than that. She gazed upon her work, and, hastily assuming that, if it were not good, at least it was good enough, went on about the combined maze of her own amusement in other quarters. The Cuban general was quite charming, and the English author—the English author—was all to be conquered. The famous climate blew suddenly very bleak for Grahame.

Ada Jeremy should have known better than to leave her work unfinished. What happened was really all her fault. She was too elusive, too casual. And the boy was undoubtedly in love, if not with her, at least with his idea of her. The last night when, instead of all her attention, he was given only charming, but brief smiles from her across other men's shoulders, he fell in with Freddy Welton, an old hanger-on of Mrs. Broderick's, and in three days the rumor went that he had been at an uproarious party at Mrs. Broderick's, hopelessly drunk. In two days more it was well known that Grahame had been losing money at Mrs. Broderick's roulette wheel.

The story first came to Ada Jeremy's ear at a dinner dance Monty Evans gave for the English author. She was amazed that night. Her capricious, dark head and creamy shoulders rose from a cloud of silver tissue, and her slippers were scarlet brocade. The English author was completely subjugated. Her leaping wit had crackled

about the dining table, and now she and Monty Evans were doing an audacious tango in the middle of the room, a tango so daring and intricate that everybody stopped to watch her feet, like small, hot flames, flickering about the floor. It was during the applause afterward, that one man behind her said to another man, in a voice meant to be inaudible:

"You can't blame that Eustis kid."

"What's he done now?" the other muttered, and Ada Jeremy, fanning and laughing, caught the name and listened. Three men were trying to compliment her at the same time, but she never missed anything.

The voice went on behind her:

"Charlie says he's gone crazy drunk, over at the Brodericks'. Says he got a revolver sometime before dinner, and swears he's going to clean out the joint. Charlie says he's quite likely to hurt somebody with it. Nice mess it would be for him, wouldn't it?"

The gayety of Ada Jeremy everybody knew, the caprice and the daring, the good temper and the carelessness. But it had never been given to many people to behold her wrath. They saw it then, those guests at Monty's dinner. They were watching her still after that tango. They saw the laughing, warm amber of her eyes change to jet slits. They saw her mobile mouth snap shut to one red line. The scarlet feathers of her fan were torn across, once, and fell about her. She rose suddenly and crossed to Monty Evans by the fireplace.

"Monty," she said in her cool, throaty tones, "I'm going over to Mrs. Broderick's for a minute. Will you get my cloak?"

"Why, Ada, what——"

"And will you run me over in your car, or shall I walk?"

It is recorded that Monty followed that billowing red cloak of hers out to his car without another word. He had seen the look in her eyes.

Before Mrs. Brodericks' discreetly shaded bungalow there were so many cars that Monty had to run his up the driveway. So that when Ada slipped out she started straight for the door on the side porch.

"Ada, wait!" he called softly, and ran after her.

She looked at him briefly.

"I don't want you to come in with me, Monty," she said.

"But, good heavens, Ada, you can't go——"

"Don't come in with me, Monty, I tell you," she repeated. "Wait at this door."

And it is proof of the strange, smoldering character of Ada's wrath that Monty, who took to danger as he took to a second cocktail, and whom no one ordered about, remained hovering, uneasy and shamefaced, just outside the door.

Within, the living room was in shadow, but from a doorway beyond, evidently the dining room, came a broad path of light and a confusion of voices. In her misty, silver laces Ada Jeremy stood a moment, considering. The elaborately decorated room was in disorder, glasses staining the piano, and a man asleep in a tumbled heap on the couch. A man and a girl, in a shadowy embrace in a corner chair, turned and stared at her suddenly with vague eyes. She did not notice them at all. A crash of glass and a shout of laughter came from the dining room. Ada stepped swiftly to the door and stood looking in.

She saw a milling crowd of people, men in evening dress, girls in flashy finery, exclaiming, shouting, laughing. Those around the roulette wheel at the table had turned around in their seats to stare. Mrs. Broderick, in salmon-pink velvet, banking at the head of the table, turned her blue eyes like cold marbles to the figure standing over her. They were all staring, laughing, shouting, at Grahame Eustis. He was sway-

ing over Mrs. Broderick's shoulder, looking very miserable and very foolish and very drunk. He was making a speech. The roulette wheel, slowly spinning, stopped, and the little ball clicked and was still. Nobody saw Ada Jeremy standing there, beyond the light.

Mrs. Broderick tired of Grahame's harangue first.

"Oh, dry up, Grahame," she said. "You're drunk. Forget it." And pushed him away, not roughly, with a long, white arm.

That was the moment when things happened. Grahame's mood changed suddenly. His face grew obstinate, boyishly ugly. He wavered for a moment, slipping his hand into his pocket. And then the women screamed and somebody upset the punch bowl with a crash as he lifted his hand and waved in their faces the short, blue steel of a cocked revolver.

"You're a swell bunch of crooks," he was shouting; "a swell bunch of crooks!" And the revolver went "bang." The glass of one window pane tinkled harmlessly down, but in the blue eddies of smoke everybody huddled in corners or tried to get under the table, screaming. Only Mrs. Broderick, like a helpless, fat, pink rabbit, remained at the head of the table, paralyzed. Now Grahame's arm, with the revolver smoking, was making wavering circles near her head.

"You—you——" he shouted, and tried to point it at her.

And then Ada Jeremy, like a cool, silver apparition, slipped through the doorway and walked calmly up to Grahame. For a long moment she stood before him while he swayed and tried to focus his eyes on her. Evidently he recognized her, for his jaw dropped perceptibly.

She held out her hand and looked at him with a glint in her eyes.

"Give me your pistol, Grahame," she said softly, and smiled at him a little.

"And don't you think it is time we were going? It's very late."

He stared, swaying. The room was very quiet. Then somebody took a deep breath, for the hand that held the revolver tightened again. But Ada held his gaze serenely.

"Give me that pistol, Grahame," she said again, and there was no mistaking the edge of command.

Grahame's face twisted suddenly. The revolver clattered to the floor.

"Mrs.—Mrs. Jeremy!" he muttered. He put his hands over his face. "I—I'm afraid I'm drunk."

Ada slipped a hand through his arm, half leading, half guiding him toward the door.

"We really must be getting on," she remarked conversationally. As they went through the living room he was sobbing a little. The distracted Monty Evans, at the door, hustled him into the car.

"Good heavens, Ada, I thought you were done for," he muttered as he backed the car out.

But all she said was: "I have been incredibly stupid, Monty," and sat sternly silent all the way home.

She took him home—yes, she did, to her own home—and Monty helped him into the familiar living room, confronting with Grahame's disheveled misery the calm gaze of Theodore lifted from his book.

"Put him to bed, you two," Ada said to them. "I'm not going to let him out of my sight until he's cured. Oh, Theodore, I almost made a frightful mess of him."

"Did you, my dear?" that comfortable man said mildly, and picked Grahame up bodily and started out of the room with him. "But you repair your very few mistakes handsomely, it always seems to me." Which shows pretty well what Theodore was like.

But she was thorough. She wired for Theodore's little cousin Caroline

and, until she could arrive, nursed a very abject Grahame back to an interest in things. Of course, he felt he was more in love with her than ever, but now he was humble about it, if reformatory. And she took it as part of her penitence that he should give her one final bad moment on the very day when Caroline was to arrive. It was after she had assured him that every man makes a fool of himself once.

"Oh, if I could only take you away from all this," he broke out with something of the forgotten fervor of his religious uncle in his voice. "You are tired of it, too. I have seen your eyes in crowded moments of this silly, hectic existence, and I know that within you there is a craving for simpler living, for long, calm hours, for—for children. I know how you spend yourself on these superficial people, wasting the precious vitality of your great nature. Yes, you do it for me, too. But why do you do it for me, Ada? Isn't it because we both don't belong here? Because your husband—all this—is really hateful to you? Oh, Ada"—he dropped to his knees beside her and his voice trembled for, after all, he was very young and his pride had been awfully hurt and he still thought he loved her desperately—"won't you let me make you happy? Won't you let me take you away from all this? You know I'm—I'm mad about you, but it really and truly isn't because of that. It's only you—your happiness."

She did not laugh at the incredible thing that youth is. She was not even brisk or temporizing.

She slipped an arm about his shoulders as he knelt there, and rubbed her cheek on his flushed forehead.

"Why, Grahame," she said softly, "what a dear you are! I shall remember that you thought that way about me, always. But, you see, my dear, there's one reason why I couldn't go away with you—one big reason."

He held his head back and gazed up at her with his lips rather pale, but a look of pride established in his eyes.

"I shall be awfully—honored—to know it," he said simply.

"Well, you see," she said, and her mouth was tenderly humorous, "I'm an awfully silly sort of woman. I like all this hectic social stuff for a while; truly I do. The rest of the year we—my husband and I—are busy digging around in strange countries and musty old books for his reference book on sociology. And, to pay me for that, he lets me have the winter time to play in as I like. And, of course, it's awfully old-fashioned, almost indecent to confess to nowadays, but, you see, I—well, honestly, I love my husband."

When Grahame returned to his hotel he walked with the firm, proud step of a strong man who has met all the griefs life has to offer and remains unbowed.

It is only noteworthy that later in the season Grahame stopped his horse, and the horse of Theodore's little cousin, Caroline, who turned out to be a shy, little white-and-gold thing, before a huge clump of white-flowering oleander, lacey snow against the sky.

"They are like you," he said as he brought a great armful to her; "white and exquisite and untouched."

And she blushed as girls sometimes do even now, and glanced up into his eyes, which were looking down into hers, solemn with the great solemnity which comes to a man aware at last of the one love of his life. He did not notice at all that, to get at the oleanders, he had utterly ruined a great bush of flaming red hibiscus. But, if he had, he would have been quite likely to have said, that really people planted too much of that flaring, red hibiscus, and not half enough of the lovelier and more subtle tropic flowers.

I have no idea at all what became of Mrs. Broderick.



Release

By

Berthe K. Mellett

Author of
"Tide of the Tavenners," "The Bacchan," etc.



BECAUSE of his high Christian character and the example he set all Englishmen, even more than because of his good works, numerous as they were, the parish renders him this memorial, Lady Chesterys." The rector pronounced the two syllables of her name like a rebuke. It was as though he knew that the woman who shrank so wanly away from him against the high needlework back of the old oak chair had never appreciated the honor it bestowed upon her; as though he accused her now when she was helpless alike to defend or rectify the past of those black crimes of prettiness and gayety and youth, which for two years had danced their witches' dance of rebellion against the background of Sir Jeffry's monumental virtues. Wretchedly she brought her hands together in her lap, and then, noting how white and flowerlike they lay against the dull black of her mourning, she took the rolled parchment on which the parish had

inscribed its great loss in Sir Jeffry Chesterys' untimely death, and noddled her fingers around it in some semblance of the abjectness which she felt.

"There will be a tablet placed in the church, also," the rector's accusing voice went on.

"I'm sure I feel very deeply the—the—" Lady Hester Chesterys looked up for the first time during the interview. A fluff of her crinkly hair escaped from the strictures of net and pin which had laid upon it and came down over her forehead, breaking the sunlight which sought her eyes into a wayward, happy shimmer. She put it back. The rector, impatient always of stiff-necked sinners, did not care to hear what it was she felt deeply, and rose. A maid, appearing with the miraculous opportuneness of household arrangement which had been left as a heritage from Sir Jeffry's régime, opened the door.

Hester looked down at her tense,

white knuckles. They refused to stick out in ugly penance. She eased their grip on the parchment and turned her face to the wind blowing up from the Thames and across the stretches of the lawn. It was spring and the windows swung wide. Her heart leaped for a moment to the flickering reflection of daffodils thrown against the dark paneling of the room. She caught it at half beat and mastered its joy. Atonement was all she could bring now to the grave of a rectitude that she had tormented, and bring it she must. White and frail and wretched, she leaned back again in the old oak chair that was like a throne, and closed her eyes.

"Hello, Hes!" The door opened again, this time without the assistance of the maid, and a pair of strong, resonant boots brought her sister-in-law into the room. With her came more of the wind, more of the clean, rollicking joviality of the spring. "What's up? Old Bleachbones been castigating souls again?"

"Don't, Winifred."

The Honorable Winifred Chesterys stopped at a table, took a cigarette from a box, and extracted her patent lighter from the pocket of her golf coat.

"Out since six," she emitted between puffs. "Glorious. Come with me tomorrow?"

"Winifred, I——" Hester gave it up. Her voice was too weak, her soul too weary, for protest. "They're putting up a tablet to Jeffery in the church," she managed to get out. "There was a parish meeting last night. Even the rector shed tears."

Winifred pulled a chair into the breeze from the windows and, still struggling with the patent lighter, sat down.

"Beastly thing," she complained, for all that she was obviously using the lighter, as she invariably did, to give herself time to marshal forces. "There," she exclaimed at last, and, clasping the

metal top of the bullet-shaped contrivance, she put it back in her pocket. "Hess"—she leaned forward in her chair—"you and I have got to have it out about Jeffery. I was his sister, and I suppose I feel as deeply as any one about his taking off. I understood him, and that's more than most people did. You, particularly, had no idea of Jeffery. If you had had any idea, you'd be acting differently now. Just because a long-faced rector——"

"Winifred, don't, dear — please." Hester managed sufficient energy to get her out of her chair and to the window. There she wilted again. Straight ahead marched the lawn down to the river, invigoratingly enough. But at its left lay the level turf board planted with yew trees cut like chessmen. It was about chess that she and her husband had had their last quiet, bitter fight. "The rector said——"

"I know what he said as well as though I had stood listening behind the door. But we'll pass him over for the present and consider you. You've got to get your spirits back, and, if you're going to do it, somebody's got to take you by the mental shoulders and shake you till your ideas rattle around like teeth. Look at you, Hester—look at you! You've worn that dress since we telephoned Francine to send it down on the day of the accident. You've had it on morning and afternoon and evening. I sometimes wonder if you sleep in it. What you need is a lot of new frocks. Nothing but frocks will do to change a woman's outlook, sometimes. Francine forgot to put any mental stimulus in that one you have on, but we must remember she was rushed. If Jeffery had died in leisurely fashion, instead of getting instantaneously smashed up in a motor, I've an idea Francine could have turned out something rather more up to the mark. We could have phoned ahead of time, you know. People do."

"Please——"

"Good heavens, Hester, you act more like the widow after she'd dropped the mite in the collection plate, than the young and wealthy relict. Buck up, child! Come to London with me this morning. It'll take something less than fifteen minutes for me to change and have the car around. We'll have a spree at Francine's. And after that, lunch. Widows do lunch, you know, and very attractively, too, in their black's of the right sort. And a *matinée*. Nothing like *matinée*—the eternal surprise of coming out of a theater and finding it still daylight."

"Winnie, I know you mean to be kind. But——" Her voice trailed off. The older woman had risen on her strong feet and was pacing the floor. Jeffery had paced the floor that night when they rowed about chess.

"Look here!" The Honorable Winifred came to a sturdy halt. "Don't you realize that old Jeof's dead, and that you're alive?"

And now the slender wisp at the window swung around, suddenly vibrant and passionate.

"Realize it?" she blazed. "Do you think I don't argue with myself as you are arguing with me now, day after day, hour after hour, world without end? Do you think I don't know that I'm alive, and that all that is alive within me does not crave to live? I want life. I want it so that the ache for it hurts in the ends of my fingers and tingles along the soles of my feet. Do you suppose I don't want to go with you to Francine's and feel soft satins against my skin and look down at lace at my wrists? My whole soul cries out——"

"What I can't understand, then, is what you think you are doing for Jeffery by denying the cry of your soul. You know, after all, the age of shearing the heads of widows is past. And, looked at calmly, Jeffery was a man

twice your age, and certainly of another temperament from you. You're letting the rector and the parish—they used to burn witches out in front of the church, you know, and the taste for it is in their blood. Naturally you loved Jeffery, but——"

"I didn't love him. If I had loved him, it would have been different. But I didn't." She came back to her chair, her hands clenched beside her, her face drawn into a tense, white mask of itself. "And that's why I've got to pay. I didn't love him. I wanted to get away. I used to look at girls no younger than myself, laughing with their lovers. And I used to envy them until I had run to my room and bite the pillows of my bed to keep back my screams. We rowed, Jeffery and I. We had rows that would have made a shindy in an alley look merciful and sweet, because ours were of the quiet, poisoned kind that hunts for the soul to kill it. Time and again I tried to find Jeffery's soul and run the knife of my hatred into it. I was to blame. I was all and all and all and all to blame. I had the man that the whole world honored for my husband, and I hated him."

"Oh, I say!" The firm feet of the Honorable Winifred planted themselves to withstand the shock. "You're nervous, you know. What you need is a cup of tea and a boiling bath. I'll ring for Elsie——"

"No, I'm going to make you understand, once and for all. I can't be tortured again about Francine's and *matinées* and lunch. It's enough that spring has come to remind me that I am alive and young. There's penance for me to do——"

"Damn penance. Jeffery was well past the years that require ardor in a wife. And what if you did spat?"

"But it wasn't spatting. It was murder. I murdered him. I drove him to that terrible drive that ended in his

death. It started about chess. I wouldn't play. I wanted to go up to town and dance and laugh and be made love to. I wanted to wear a gown of pink satin—a gown like an apple blossom—and drink champagne. I told him so. He asked how I thought he would look doing things like that. I said, very well, then, I would find a way to get a divorce and marry some one who hadn't such a reputation for piety to live up to. I repeated that about the divorce again and again. I said I would do it. I said there must be a way, and that I would find it. His face went white. I didn't know he had left the room until I heard a car tearing down the avenue toward the road."

"Oh, I say—a divorce!" Even her widely planted feet were inadequate to preserve the balance of the Honorable Winifred. She resorted to her lighter again and another cigarette. They were a great help. "But, after all," she said at length, stiff puffing, "you didn't do it, and you wouldn't have done it—which is the only important thing. I'll tell Elsie about the boiling bath as I go up to change. Mind you take it."

And being really, for all her valor, terrified of emotional crises, the Honorable Winifred left the room.

Hester's flame of strength went out, and her weariness returned. Winifred was kind. She wished Winifred would not be kind. It made it worse. Perhaps, after all, the boiling bath would soothe a little.

A maid was at the door again.

"Mr. Stothers," she announced, and withdrew.

"My dear Lady Chesterys!" The elongated Mr. Stothers of the firm of Stothers & Bennet, solicitors, had something electric about him to-day. It was almost as though a corpse had been suddenly animated, but was endeavoring to disguise the fact. Hester found herself wondering wanly if, perhaps, solicitors felt the spring, too, and had

to put great weights upon their hearts to suppress them. "I am come upon a preposterous piece of business," continued Mr. Stothers; "the most preposterous—" And stopped.

"Yes?" Hester sat still in her chair, holding the parchment. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks—walked from the bus—warm for this season. As I said—preposterous bit of business—but I must see Sir Jeffry's papers."

"Sir Jeffry was very methodical. All papers pertaining in any way to the estate are already in your hands. It would have been quite unlike Sir Jeffry to have any but extremely personal papers, such as might be wanted for his memoirs, here at home."

"Have you been through—those extremely personal papers?" The suggestion of glee lurked under the solicitor's gloomy exterior.

"No. I have not felt—"

"Good. Very good. Have you any idea what they contain?"

"They are diaries and letters, and a few loose papers found in his pockets when he was brought home."

"My visit here to-day is for the purpose of looking through such things as were found in his pockets."

"When I feel stronger I shall do that myself."

"I must insist, Lady Chesterys—in fact, I must almost order you not to look at those papers. It is my duty to spare you pain."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is"—relish for an idea seemed to water in his mouth for a moment—"that a fellow solicitor—Berryman of Berryman & Holt—has been to me in regard to a purported—preposterous claim, of course, knowing Sir Jeffry's reputation as we did—a purported document—a codicil to his will, as it were, or perhaps more correctly a note of hand to mature at his death."

"That is very possible. My husband was extending the estate."

"Exactly. Sir Geoffrey was extending—in fact, Berryman contends that it had already been extended to conclude— However, the whole contention is absurd."

"Do you mean——" And now suddenly Lady Chesterys had to pause and do battle with certain muscles of her diaphragm which threatened to send a jet of laughter up through her throat. Geoffrey! Pious-pie old Geoffrey! It was too wonderful to be true. No wonder Stothers had electric sparks shooting out from him! "Do you mean," she repeated, "that there was something in Sir Geoffrey's life which we—which no one——"

"A woman, madame. Recall that I said at the outset that the whole thing was preposterous! A woman—such persons often spring up after a wealthy man's death—asserts that a paper had been executed in her favor as a means of keeping her quiet when Sir Geoffrey was married two years ago. She states that she intended to hold this paper until Sir Geoffrey's death, or until he found it convenient to take it up before his death. That, upon the night of March thirtieth last, Sir Geoffrey presented himself at her home in Richmond begging for the paper and offering its face value in cash. The claimant states that Sir Geoffrey was in such a state of nervous excitement that she handed the paper over, as a means of calming him, and that on the morning of April first he started in the car he was driving himself for London to procure the money, but hit a bus instead."

"Yes." Laughter in her throat all but strangled Lady Chesterys. Poor old scared Geoffrey! What a difference it would have made could she have known this all the time! She went to the window and indulged her aching throat in a fit of coughing. When she turned to Mr. Stothers again he was

struck with the amazing idea that she was a good-looking woman. Might even say a beauty, in a wishy-washy way.

Jerking himself loose from irrelevant and unprofessional thoughts, Mr. Stothers returned to the issue.

"I must see the miscellany from the pockets, just to prove the contention groundless."

"But if the contention is not groundless?"

"Lady Chesterys, did not you and I and all the world know Sir Geoffrey?"

"Oh, yes. But as a mere supposition—just for the pleasure of speculating."

"Ah—just as a mere supposition—why, with the note in my hands, something rather neat in the way of a settlement might be made."

"You mean that, if you were in possession of the document, the alleged woman might be forced to accept a considerable discount?"

"There is always advantage in possession."

"But the woman—the poor woman!"

"I do not think we need to consider that phase of the supposition. Women of that sort——"

"I see. Women of that sort—— But in such event, Mr. Stothers, why preserve the note at all? Documents in safes are notoriously explosive. Why not touch a match——"

"It is precisely because some such unconsidered or accidental disaster as touching a match might occur, that I must look through Sir Geoffrey's papers at once. The woman claims to have letters, and she threatens to give them to a quite undesirable Sunday journal for publication if we do not——"

"It doesn't seem to me we are in such an advantageous position after all, Mr. Stothers. Hadn't we better pay her what she wants at once, and have done? Why bother to look for the paper at all, since——"

"Ah! But there you show the lack of legal training. We must ascertain immediately whether the paper is a fact or a fiction. If it is not in Sir Geoffrey's papers, it has never existed. It is a fiction. And, if the paper, or note, or document, or codicil, is a fiction, then the letters with which Berryman's client threatens us we may also look upon as fiction."

"I see. We are not to pay the poor soul a farthing if we can help it. In all conscience, isn't the estate sufficient to stand the strain of a little charity?"

"Charity such as you imply—unless we adopt it as a choice between two evils—would be of all things the most indiscreet. You cannot pay out any considerable sum of money without wind of the transaction getting about. Money talks, Lady Chesterys. It might almost be said to blab. We must account to the estate for every cent spent, and some one would hear of the payment to the claimant and make a fine story out of it, you may be sure. No, taken all in all, it is providential that, since he had to die sometime anyway, Sir Geoffrey chose to do it when the paper was on his person and certain to come into my hands, providing—always providing that the paper exists, which is a preposterous supposition. But to return. The smaller the payment that has to be made, the smaller the wind that will be raised."

"I see." Hester sought the window again. The breeze had strengthened and the chessmen on the grass were dancing, mingling themselves and cavorting in some huge and Rabelaisian mate. If she watched them, she would presently emulate them, swing out and join in their mighty jest.

"Perhaps"—she turned, dimming herself against the light into a black and expressionless shadow—"the woman has the paper, after all, and we shall be beautifully tricked, if, failing to find it among my husband's papers, we re-

fuse to meet her terms. She would probably both collect the money and print the letters. You see, Geoffrey may not have taken the paper, after all—may have put it down and gone off to the bank without it. The whole thing seems to have been so informal, why not that? Has she looked in all her vases on her mantel, I wonder? You've no idea how many vases some people have on their mantels, and how many things they drop into them."

"Knowing Sir Geoffrey, I should say the last thing he would do would be to drop a valuable document into a vase on a mantel."

"I suppose so. I suppose you're right. Still—" She paused and seemed to fall a-dreaming for a moment. "Do you know," she finally resumed, "that the parish has voted a memorial and tablet? The tablet's to go up in the church at once."

Mutually secret, they enjoyed their thoughts in the silence which followed.

"Well," said Stothers, rousing himself, "if you will direct me—"

She paid no heed. Still and slim against the light, she stood staring before her, a smile in the eyes that he could not see. Mr. Stothers was used to respecting the silence of widows—that is, of widows of the importance of Lady Chesterys. He remained, as it were, suspended with his last sentence, one hand upon the pocket in which he proposed to store the document when it should be found. He meant to say, if it should be found.

"I wonder—" Lady Chesterys spoke dreamily, but with a certain singing something in her voice. "But there—charity is indiscreet unless— No, it wouldn't do at all. You really meant it, didn't you, when you said that we couldn't pay over a sum—the sum, for instance, which Sir Geoffrey expected to take from the bank—providing, of course, he intended to take a sum from the bank?"

"If he was going to the bank for money, there was a reason for it, which implies the existence of the document in question, which, in its turn, implies that we shall find it among his papers, and be able to make an advantageous arrangement."

"A discount—a substantial discount?"

"Precisely."

"You are a very professional man, Mr. Stothers."

"I try to adhere to the high principles of the law."

"You pay your debts?"

"My dear Lady Chesterys—"

"I didn't mean that question to be as impertinent as it sounded. I was only asking because—of course, I know that the butcher and the baker and the candlestick maker always have their checks by the tenth of the month at the latest. But it wasn't exactly about such tangible obligations as butcher's meat I asked. What I wanted to know was how you would act if, for instance, some one had suddenly liberated you from an oppressing idea—perhaps even without intending to do so—perhaps with a quite opposite idea. But, if any one should do that, wouldn't you feel that you owed— No, that's no good. Good-by, Mr. Stothers."

She held out her hand.

"But the papers, Lady Chesterys! If you will have a maid conduct me—"

"I told you I should look through the papers when I felt strong enough. I feel strong enough now. I shall do it to-day."

"But nothing could be more irregular. I must insist—"

"Good-by, Mr. Stothers!" And she spoke with such finality that Mr. Stothers remembered she was Lady Chesterys, a personage with whom one did not insist upon things. He withdrew.

The memorial which the rector had brought lay upon the floor. Leaving it there, Hester crossed the room and followed with appreciative eyes as Mr.

Stothers took his long-legged way down the avenue. Wrenching madness was still in her body, writhing activity at her source of laughter. Stothers, too, had the look of a man suppressing—yeast, as it were. He loved the joke, too. He was released. Oh, that vast and ponderous rectitude of Sir Jeffry, how it had weighed down and broken the wings of souls! Even of such souls as Stothers'. She wanted to call Stothers back and bid him laugh openly with her at the little rift in that rectitude, through which the light of day now shone. But, no, she couldn't trust Stothers.

She found the document. A little thin and typed banner of incriminating evidence to nail to the masthead of her purpose.

"Mrs. Helen Wicky . . . heirs and assigns forever . . . one hundred thousand pounds."

Only one hundred thousand pounds! Cheap—unbelievably cheap! Why, wars for liberation came at that much per day—per hour! To say nothing of the cost in hate. And this had come only with laughter, and the dancing of yew-tree chessmen on the lawn. Pious-pie old Jeffry! Why did he have to wait until he was dead to present a single imperfection to the world and so gain a human soul? What if the parish did pass sanctimonious resolutions now, and the rector disapprove? What difference did anything make, now that she knew Jeffry had been made of human clay? And the tablet in the church? Why, she could positively love the tablet in the church.

Folding the paper small, she thrust it into the pocket of her coat and pulled on a small, lugubrious hat. Dismal thing! She'd have to get herself some decent clothes. Still, with her pearls showing, the effect was not so bad. She pulled the gems rosily from under the black of her gown. Much better. Almost nice.

Her dog leaped against her as she came down into the hall again. Too bad that she had to order him down and that he slunk away in reproachful disappointment. Next time she'd take him for a run. It was a promise. Two gardeners smiled at each other as she ran along the avenue. They'd wondered how long the poor young thing would stay behind walls. You might say she'd always been behind walls—leastways since she came to Chesterys House, with Sir Jeoffry that stiff and glum.

She dared not board a bus at the gate. Lady Chesterys might run or walk in sight of her household, but she couldn't get on a bus. She walked the better part of a mile, came to a safe turning, and waited until one came storming jovially up. Good old bus. It was fun to lurch to the top, and fall toward a front seat, and feel the leaves above swish by almost in your face. It was a long ride into London and out to Richmond. Strothers had said Richmond, and the paper had said Mrs. Helen Wicky. She took the wad of paper from her pocket and shoved it into her glove to have it handy. There were sure to be vases on the mantel of a Mrs. Helen Wicky of Richmond.

It wasn't hard to find the house. The first butcher's boy she encountered after descending at the green was on his way there with the daily joint. Lady Chesterys followed the trail of his bicycle, waited until he had gone, and rang the bell. A maid, very respectable in morning stripes, responded. A lanky girl of nine or so peered around a curtain of knotted chenille cords. Back of that curtain there was certain to be a room with vases into which one might drop a wad of paper unobserved. The maid banished the lanky girl and held aside the cords of knotted chenille. Yes; over the fireplace; fat ones, thin ones, higgledy-piggledy ones—and a clock! A clock—reverend harbinger of all the treasures of all the Mrs. Helen

Wickys in the world! If she could get to that clock and get it open—

A presence behind her stopped her in full flight across the room.

Commanding what composure one might under such circumstances, Lady Chesterys emitted a flustered greeting.

"How do you do?" she said in a cross between a gasp and a giggle.

The watch that lay almost horizontally from the fleur-de-lis pin, that anchored it to Mrs. Helen Wicky's buxom bosom, rose and fell ominously.

"Go away, Marty," she said, waving a commanding hand behind her. There was movement again in the knotted cords of the curtain. "Well, what now?" To her visitor.

"I am Lady Chesterys."

"Yes, I know. I stood next you once at Harrod's when you were ordering."

"Did you? Harrod's is a lark, isn't it?"

"Can't say. I take shopping serious. Won't you sit down—over here on this side of the room?"

"I was thinking what a pretty clock! May I see—"

"Never mind the clock. Won't you sit down—here." There was authority in the plump forefinger which indicated a chair near the door. Lady Chesterys retreated toward it and sat down lightly on the edge.

"My solicitor," she began rather feebly, on another tack, "has been to see me."

"I dare say. He would be. Stothers all over. Get somebody else to do the dirty work. Well, Stothers or no Stothers, you don't get near that clock unless its over my dead body. One hundred thousand pounds I want, same as was rightfully mine according to the document, or I publish the letters. Two of 'em I got—one before Marty, and one two years ago when he was going to get married regular, and thought he'd feel safer if he could see me again and buy me off. Not much, they ain't, taken

separate. But read together, with seven years in between, most folks could fill in a story that'd fit the ending I'd put to it when I told about him coming two weeks ago, scared into a clabber because his wife had said she was going to hunt up evidence on him, and he wanted the paper back to be safe."

"But the clock—do you mean to say that you have the letters in the clock?"

"As though you weren't here to get them from that very place! Stretched half across the room toward it, you were, when I walked in on you." And the staunch Mrs. Helen Wicky planted herself resolutely before the ticking repository. It was hopeless, then. Never could so light and frail a craft as Lady Chesterys override that stout galleon. Abandoning the little plot which had appealed to her whimsy, Hester came reluctantly to the obvious method.

"What if I could give you the paper of which you speak—in return for the letters, of course."

"Likely!" Mrs. Wicky permitted herself an abbreviated snort of contempt. "Likely of you and Stothers to come handing me a hundred thousand on a silver plate. No, you'd bargain, unless there was a trick in it somewhere. Fifty thousand, you'd say, or twenty-five, or even five in the hand, is better than a rumpus in the papers with no cash following, you'd say. Likely you'd bring me the paper, all done up with a blue ribbon tied to it! No, I wouldn't believe no paper that come from your hands that way, not if mortal eye failed to see where it differed from the true. There'd be a trick in it, a trick you'd wait to spring till I'd handed over the letters. No, that paper that old Jeffry had on him——"

Hester rose from the chair where she was poised. After all, she would have to get to the clock. Or to the vases.

"But, Mrs. Wicky," she began, "that

paper is not among the things taken from Sir Jeffry's pockets. It is—I mean, it appears to have gone astray. I thought, perhaps—you see Sir Jeffry doubtless stood talking with you after it was delivered to him, and he might have dropped it in some receptacle. People do, you know. And the vases—being a housekeeper myself, I know what strange things get into vases. If I might look——"

"Likely!" The broad Mrs. Wicky became a fortress before the whole mantel shelf. "And they been dusted—by me."

"Oh." And now a drift of anger rose like smoke before Lady Chesterys' purpose. The first free, gay action at which she had had a chance in two long years hindered by stupidity. "You don't know, I suppose, how difficult you make it for people to be helpful and pleasant toward you. I came here with nothing but the very happiest sort of ideas in my mind. The only thing I wanted to do was to get the paper into your hands and turn the joke on Stothers. It had to be secret and sly because—well, because of Stothers. But now you act in a manner to put all of the generous thoughts I ever had out of my head. You make me as suspicious as you. How do I know that the old paper you talk of hadn't already been paid when Sir Jeffry was killed? Come to think of it, it's extremely unlikely that you would present an unpaid note of hand, or whatever it was, to the man who made it out, unless the face value of it had already been delivered to you. Why would you give an unpaid paper into Sir Jeffry's hands?"

"Why? Because I was a softy. And, having been a softy and come out the small end of the horn, as could be expected, I ain't going to be a softy again. Plain soft, I was. He looked green when he come that night—scared green. And, for all that he'd always been a

fraud and a hypocrite and a blaster of everybody's joy, whenever old Jeffry said he'd pay money, he always paid money. So, just to stop his teeth from chattering before they was all worn down, I give him the paper, and said when opening time come in the morning he could be at the bank in London, and bring the money back to me. He was that grateful that I could 'ave wept, if it hadn't been funny, too. He even went up to have a look at Marty where she laid asleep, and then, being too shaky in the nerves to drive his car back to London himself that night, he poked up the fire here and made out for the night on the couch."

"In this room. He slept in this room?"

"Yes. I've pressed the chintz since. He turned over, restless like, I guess, and it was in a wudge."

And now around the broad defenses of her hostess, Lady Chesterys sailed the dainty frigate of her person, and sank down upon the couch in question, her arms propped behind her for support. If her fingers were busy with the buttoned seams of the chintz cover to the couch, Mrs. Helen Wicky did not see.

"Why, then—then—" And suddenly she whirled in her seat and began openly feeling along the crevices of upholstery. "Why, then, it may be in this! It may have fallen from his pockets as he slept—"

Like a condor swooping upon a dove, Mrs. Helen Wicky was upon her, pulling her backward by the shoulders, flinging her aside.

"Sneak!" She breathed heavily, throwing up a whirlwind of chintz and cushions around her. "Helpful and pleasant ideas, you had, eh? Yes; helpful to you to get hold of what's rightly mine. Coming into my own

house, and mining in my own Chesterfield coach— Ah-h-h-h!"

And she fished up a crumpled wad of paper.

Crossing Richmond Green, Lady Chesterys walked with the quiet dignity befitting Lady Chesterys. But up on the free, wind-swept deck of the bus she allowed herself to laugh and to scatter bits of paper, tiny bits of paper, like a trail. She'd got the letters out of the clock. It hadn't been hard to bargain with Mrs. Helen Wicky after the wad of paper had been found back of the upholstery of the couch. And it was better to get them and know they were gone. After all, there was the memorial from the parish, and the tablet in the church, to be thought of. It never in the world would do to dim the glory of those two monuments. It never in the world would do to dim any glory in all the wide, wide world. And it would be wonderful to have those things to smile at, inwardly. The rector, too. With what secret humor one could take the rector after this.

She descended from the bus beyond the safe turning, flew over the distance to the gate, and along the avenue to Chesterys House.

"Oh, Win!" she called as she came into the hall and bounded up the stairs.

Her sister-in-law appeared in astonishment at the door of her room. A smile broke across her fine, plain face.

"You're outing's done you good."

"Win"—Hester was panting gloriously, laughing and panting and holding her hand against her vibrantly beating side—"how about that lunch you promised me? It's not too late now, is it, if I order the car right away? And after lunch we'll go on a spree at Francine's. I've simply got to have some clothes."



Live Water

By Rice Gaither

Author of "The Pardoning of Bellard," "Flight,"
"The Knife," etc.

THE valley is still there, but I doubt that anybody calls it Nature's Dimple. For me, at least, there is irony in the designation, which I came upon first in the brochure of a publicist who promoted my desire to be a guest at the Mountain Vale Inn—irony because I cannot think of that smile on the painted old face of the earth without memories of a night in the violently darkened hostelry, when I sat before a doomed fireplace and listened to the flood torrent gurgling around the foundations of our slipping safety.

I must confess, however, that I saw nothing sinister in the Dimple that morning in spring when, having crossed the river, I stood like stout Cortez upon the peak which looked down into the cup. The eminence to which I had climbed rose sheer out of the rushing stream and towered above a valley which might have been a small, mountain-rimmed Pacific. Indeed, I thought of a bay I have known, green with brine and billowy with wind and purple here and there with shadows of clouds moving over it in bright contrast to sun out of an azure sky.

It was not far across the valley or up and down it. With field glasses I could see that the gate through which the river entered was wide and deep, and

that the outlet, no farther away than I could discern an eagle flying, was a narrow cleft in the mountains. The hotel, consisting of two parallel wings, one set on ground a little higher than the other, the two connected by a colonnade, was, one might say, in the very pit of the Dimple, lying in a crescent of the river. The railroad, on a high embankment, came in with the river and cut straight across the valley to the river's exit. There was no other access to or egress from that valley save the wagon trail that crossed the bridge down there under the cliff I stood on, and wound away over the mountains.

The only thing that disturbed me even faintly was the conjuncture of two bits of color which I saw almost a thousand feet below me on the green of the links. Gray heather and maroon told me that my friend Bob Lane was strolling about with a certain Mrs. Darrell; and while I held nothing against this young woman, who was, indeed, quite beautiful, except the opinion that she was rather theatrical in appearance, I was annoyed. Perhaps I was even jealous because Bob had declined to come with me on my tramp. I don't know. But, anyway, when I saw them together I decided to go down immediately. So, making my way from handhold to toe-

hold among the bushes and low rocks along the dry watercourse which was my path to the wagon trail, I found myself half an hour later on the bridge. There I paused to reconnoiter. Upon the green I saw dozens of sweaters: yellow and red and brown and blue, even maroons and gray heathers, but nowhere a maroon and a gray heather moving provokingly together.

I was staring rather ill-naturedly down into the river, I suppose, when some one spoke to me.

"Hit's a muddyin' up a bit," the voice said at my elbow.

I was not ungrateful for the diversion. A man with a red face and a black mustache and a silver star on the vest, which he wore without a coat, leaned with me on the rail; and I was interested, viewing the water immediately beneath us, to perceive that it verily had changed color. Since I had crossed it hardly two hours before its clear aquamarine had become tinged with the yellow of Carolina mud.

"Does it often muddy this way?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, "when there are heavy rains." Then, when he saw me looking at the blue sky fitting down over the rim of our little world he explained that the downpour might be somewhere "up yonder" in the mountains.

I surmised aloud that he knew the vagaries of that river very well, and he spat into it to show me his familiarity. Rain made the river yellow and swelled it, he told me; and he showed me a bush jutting out of the lesser wall of the river bed which marked flood stage. The water seemed to bank up, sometimes, against the buttresses of the lower gate; once, it had almost reached the level of the golf links.

"If it ever does," he said, "you people at the hotel better look out. Because it's live."

"Well," I said, remembering suddenly that I hadn't had the mail, "I suppose we

can get out when we see it coming." And with some mutterings in my ears derogating from the intelligence of lowlanders, strode off in the direction of a chair on the broad veranda.

A negro boy on whom I had heaped largess saw me afar off, and, smiling his understanding of my gestures, disappeared into the lobby, wherefrom he emerged a moment later with letters which, I thought he explained unnecessarily, had come last night. I asked:

"Where is the morning paper?"

"Isn't any, sir."

"No paper? What's the matter with them up at Asheville?"

I'm quite sure he told me. But I didn't hear him, for by that time I had slit the end of an envelope and was deep in the contents of a letter saying that our chief engineer had suddenly, and, for the moment, unexpectedly, resigned.

It irked me to have to return to the cold of the North, as I perceived I must, and something like sadness came over me when I thought of Turley's going after all these years of service. But I got a vicarious thrill out of the chance that Bob, while he was yet twenty-nine years of age, might have the post I knew he coveted; and I ran quickly through the stack of mail to see if there was a company envelope for him. There was—I thought I knew its contents—and there was another envelope addressed to him in Margaret's firm hand.

It seemed to me then that those two letters, if my guess was right, represented about all that a young man can hope to achieve. They were the concrete symbols of the reward which we like to think awaits the candidate of sterling worth and diamond brilliance. I shut my eyes so that I might picture him at the chief's old desk in the high building downtown where the Consolidated Water Power Company had its endless offices, and then, like the hero of a correspondence school advertisement, at the

wheel of a high-powered motor car, driving up the Avenue with Margaret at his side.

Stated that way, all this sounds like a fairy story. But it isn't, really. Men jealous of Bob—and there were some—had always said the cards were stacked for him, and perhaps they were, since he was the son of old Burwell Lane, who owned a third of the Consolidated, and the girl he meant to marry was the daughter of another third; but I have seen many a man unable to take a made-up trick, and many a rich man's son measure short of positions which birth put in his way. Already Bob had proved himself in an emergency for our company, of which I cannot here tell. And so my wishes were engaged when, holding those two letters in my hand, I glanced up and saw him coming toward me across the lawn. He was with Mrs. Darrell.

I have said, haven't I, that Mary Darrell was quite beautiful? Somehow, she reminded me of the opulence of the valley. Her eyes were like the azure sky, and her hair like the dusk that lay on the mountains while the heavens were still bright with day. But, however beautiful she was, and however guileless had appeared the valley, unaccountable misgivings smote me when I saw her again, and still—with Bob. It came over me suddenly that she had danced with him too much last night; and that, walking the moonlit veranda, I had come upon them sitting close together on a vine-shadowed bench, and speaking softly.

I say that misgiving was queer and unaccountable. And yet I don't know. I think, perhaps, there was something palpable in their exchange of glances as they came nearer. Bob, a thin line between his brows, looked at her with unhappy devotion; and she, at word from him indistinguishable to me, let her lids flutter down over the blue of her eyes, so she seemed darker than I

had known. But when they reached the steps of the veranda, and I rose from my chair, she flashed him a smile that was the color of red lips and azure irises, and, with a wave of her hand, vanished through the lobby.

Bob did not move until I spoke to him. He only stood looking after her, that unhappy furrow still cleaving his brow.

"Well," I said, "you'd better have your mail."

His eyes came toward me as if I had jerked them, and he held out a hand that was meant to be eager. But, though I saw him read the blue embossing of the Consolidated's envelope, and then the superscription of Margaret's letter, the hand dropped to his side again, and he stared blankly at the weatherboarded wall.

"Turley has resigned," I said.

"The deuce!" broke from his lips softly, and warm color came into his face. I knew the chance was what he wanted. But he acted strangely. He took a swift step as if he were going to call Mary Darrell back. If he meant to change his mind about anything, however, he didn't change it wholly. He ripped open the company letter, read it, and passed it over to me.

"We'll have to get out this afternoon," I said, scanning the tight lines of the Old Man.

"Yes," he said absently; and then, after a moment, as if he was just realizing a discrepancy between his words and his intentions: "I can't get away this afternoon. I've an engagement to play golf with Mrs. Darrell."

It took the lumbering parts of my mind a moment to articulate the thing he had just told me, it was so utterly absurd; Mrs. Darrell against the Consolidated, or—still more absurd—a golf match against a career. It wasn't like Bob to say a thing of that sort, even in jest. But, also, it wasn't like him to spend hours as I realized suddenly he

had been spending them. So far as I knew, there had never been a woman except Margaret. Bob had wanted to achieve. And now that opportunity had come to him—it was incredible!

"Bob," I said, "you don't mean to stay here and philander with that woman!"

Amazingly he crimsoned; but when he spoke his voice had the cold edge of anger.

"You forget yourself," he said.

I knew that, if I stayed with him in that mood, I should forget myself still further as concerned Mrs. Darrell; and so I turned away; not hopelessly, of course, because I felt that in a little while he would come to his senses, but with a new insight of human frailty. Who would have thought a week ago that our stalwart engineer could be swerved even for one mad interval from the clear path his youth had surveyed? It was, that languorous, lotus-eating valley, I told myself as I stepped off the veranda into the warm sunshine. Thank Heaven, I would soon have him back in New York.

He had left the veranda when I climbed the steps again, and I thought he must have rejoined Mrs. Darrell; but of this surmise I was quickly disabused when, in the sun room, I came upon her, as usual the center of a masculine group. She was no longer in a sweater, but had on a gown with a long skirt that clung to her, somehow, in spite of its amplexness, and showed her slim and yet firm and round. I had the paradoxical thought that, if a man lifted her up, he would find her heavier than he expected.

"I didn't know we could see the river from this window," she said, permitting surprise to quicken her languid drawl. "One might almost think it had come nearer since morning."

I found myself hating the low-pitched voice, which yet held beauty, even for me, who loved Bob; and so I left the sun room forthwith. In the suite which

Bob and I occupied together, I discovered him staring out upon the little park of grass and trees, the Consolidated's letter clutched tightly in his hand.

"Bob," I said in that taken-for-granted manner which is sometimes superior to persuasion, "hadn't you better be putting your things into your trunk?"

He looked around with no more surprise than if he himself had been considering the same thing. But he repeated stubbornly:

"I've an engagement to play golf with Mrs. Darrell."

Of course, I couldn't answer his ridiculous obstinacy. As I began to pack my own things, however, he said almost plaintively:

"I'd like to go."

Then I was amazed to find myself arguing seriously upon the absurd basis he had proposed.

"I'm sure Mrs. Darrell would let you off if you told her about your letter from the company," I said, adding with what irrelevancy I could put into my tones: "Margaret proposed a week-end, didn't she? I had a letter, too, you know."

"Oh, yes, that," he replied absently, as if he were unable to remember Margaret in the blind dazzlement of some one else's beauty. Then: "See here, old fellow, you ought not to be hard on Mrs. Darrell. She's had a raw deal—married to a man who doesn't love her, who neglects her, who is cruel to her, who—"

"Well, are you going with me to New York?" I had to stop him, somehow.

"Perhaps. I'll see."

Knowing what he meant by that perhaps, it was with little hope that I sent him alone down to luncheon with Mrs. Darrell. "She'll never let him go," I told myself. And yet, when I reached the dining room a little later, and saw them seated at a table for two set in the half privacy of a bay window, I guessed by the line between his brows that he

had already told her what he wanted, and, by her gestures of indifference, which I supposed were assumed, that, surprisingly, she must have acquiesced.

"You'll come back Monday?" Her lips framed the words as clearly as if I had seen them printed.

"Yes," he nodded.

And she smiled.

It was the smile that made me think that, after all, I had misread her lips, her gestures. I was sure she wanted him, and, having taken her for a clever woman, unable to believe that she would let him go so easily; because I felt certain that, if he got free one moment of her surpassing enchantments, he would not return to the thrall of them. Somehow, I never had a doubt, that, clear of the alluring valley, Bob would revert swiftly to himself, and, looking back upon the interlude, be confounded by his own amazing defections.

They must have eaten scantily, if at all, for they rose from the table before my glass was filled. Or had I waited rather long? My watch told me that I really had, that something had gone wrong with the flawless service of the Mountain Vale Inn. Looking about the room for my habitual waiter, I was puzzled to find neither him nor others of his color. Instead, two or three white maids who belonged to the upper floors were flitting incompetently about with trays.

"One moment, sir," the white head waiter communicated with me in that inaudible but perfectly intelligible speech which men of his profession know how to employ; but when that moment stretched too long I followed Bob and Mary Darrell out of the dining room.

Amazingly, I found Bob alone and in good spirits in the smoking room.

"Well, what about it?" I attempted to be casual.

"All right," he answered cheerfully. "I'm ready when you are. The train's at three, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"Better run up and look about the room while I settle at the desk."

Because I felt his going would settle everything, it really dazed me that I should be getting him away so easily—back to Turley's old job and Margaret. Association with them would bring him to his senses. Was it that Mary Darrell didn't want him, or had I been wrong about her cleverness?

I was still ruminating by the desk, our bill unpaid, when he came running downstairs, grumbling about the elevator service. He was going; plainly he was going. In his hand he had the brief case containing the blue prints with which he always traveled.

"Well, let's go," he said.

I called the clerk.

"I want to pay our bill."

"Anything the matter, sir?"

"No. We're getting out on the three o'clock train."

He eyed me quizzically. Then:

"There isn't any train. The flood, you know."

I was quite dumb; chagrin, anger, and bafflement all mixed up inside of me, and the image of Mrs. Darrell haunting me: her smile, her confidence, her knowledge of the thing that was fighting for her. I thought of her waiting in her room in triumph.

"Order me a car." I spoke at last.

"You can't get out," protested the clerk. "The water's already on the bridge."

"Order me a car," I repeated doggedly.

He ordered it. I heard him arguing with the garage, heard him carrying his point, and then stepped out on the veranda to await the motor.

Outside, I became aware that the landscape had somehow altered. First I noticed that the beautiful gray rocks of the creek that flowed close to the south end of the inn were hidden by a yellow flood which I could actually see

climbing the banks of the stream. Then, from the other end of the veranda, as never before, was visible the upper horn of the river's crescent, shimmering in the glancing sun. About the steel superstructure of the wagon bridge the water whitened, and, just above the road, a wet tongue licked out across the golf links in the direction of the rising creek.

"Wait. Isn't that the train?" asked Bob.

It was not a sudden noise, but one of which I became increasingly conscious as we listened. It was a sound that extinguished almost all other sound. We couldn't hear the loud motor of the cheap car which at that instant topped the railway embankment and slid down toward the hotel. We could only see it race with that sinister wet tongue and come plunging toward the veranda, there to be drowned in the stream that reached the creek in one sudden leap and made an island of the ground our building stood on. We saw the driver scramble out and reach our island just as a crescendo of sound commanded us to look in vain for the bridge which but a moment ago had vaunted its steel strength toward the soft sky.

"Bob," I said, as if that were the only thing that mattered, "you can't get away."

A4 A5 I think I told you, back in the beginning, the plan of the Mountain Vale Inn as I saw it from the heights; but, in order that you may understand clearly the events which followed the first rush of the flood across the grounds of our hostelry, perhaps I had better stop here to say again that the building which housed us was in two parallel wings connected at one end by a colonnade at right angles. Such construction is not unusual. What I think peculiar is the fact that these two wings—one nearer to the river than the other—were set at different levels, so that the connecting colonnade had to be approached from

the lower wing by stairs. In the quadrangle between the two, the ground dipped sharply.

Bob and I were in the upper wing, which was the main wing, nearer to the railroad, farther from the river. This wing contained the office, dining room, smoking room, sun room, and lobby; whereas, the lower wing opposite was given over entirely to the living suites, except for the grand ballroom, which, on the lower floor, ran from one end of the building to the other. Both wings were built of wood, set on concrete pilings. They were about thirty yards apart.

The lower wing, having the better outlook, contained the more guests on that warm, sunny afternoon in spring when the river, rising out of its banks, cut across the greensward, not only between the upper wing and the railroad where the ground was low, but also in the sharp depression that lay between the two units of the inn.

There was no panic when the water came, though most of the guests were women, as is usual at resort hotels; but with one accord, apparently, all of us who were in the upper, and, for the moment, safer wing, rushed to the veranda facing the quadrangle and our more dangerously situated fellows, at whom we stared and who stared reciprocally at us.

What I remember when I look back upon that interchange of regard, is the quiet of it. Perhaps we were not really dumb; maybe it was only that the roar of the river drowned the surprised inepititude of our voices. But I remember the human silence, a sort of hushed waiting, and then after a long time, it seems, the manager's trumpeting through his hands—a sound so puny, so absurd, so utterly ridiculous, that some of us laughed at him. He said for the people on the other side of the quadrangle to get out and come over to our wing. We laughed again when a little man near me, who had a wife over on the other side,

jumped off the veranda and pulled an old boat from under the house, and was restrained from launching it only by the manager who pointed out that the colonnade was still high and dry, though an angry stream of water was coursing under it.

"Plenty of time," he said reassuringly. But I noticed that he hurried the line of refugees who came with hastily gathered hand bags and in various intimate costumes; and that the water frothed about the foundations of the colonnade as he ran, the crowd said, to wake any guests who might be taking their siestas in the immediately threatened wing.

"He'll get them all out, won't he?" asked Bob with anxiety which seemed somehow disproportionate to the danger, as the rest of us conceived it.

"Yes, of course he will," I answered, certainly not understanding; and, in fact, preoccupied with watching for the manager who seemed to have stayed an unconsciously long time. I had no very kindly feelings for this hotel man, who must have suppressed flood warnings from his guests; but I wanted him to hurry. The water was rising fast and the colonnade looked rather precarious. In fact, one of the long pilings in the center sank and disappeared just as he emerged from the doorway and started back toward our wing.

There was something heroic about the figure outlined against the flood. I suppose he didn't see the piling go, for he walked slowly, rather, until some one shouted to him. Then he ran. He had almost reached the point from which one support had fallen away when its twin leaned out stiffly and went down, so that the platform sagged and broke under him. The crowd cheered when he made a flying leap that seemed at first to have landed him safely. But the cheer broke off sharply as he slipped down the incline, and, his hand still clutching the balustrade, went swirling out into the yellow river.

It was while our broken cheer still smote against the roar of the flood that Mary Darrell appeared on the second floor balcony of the deserted wing. How we came to see her, I don't know, for it seems to me now that my eyes must have clung a long time to that twisted bit of balustrade. But I suppose one always saw Mary Darrell. She came out rather slowly and, laying a hand on the rail, looked down as if to find out what we had all been shouting about. I can't begin to tell you the effect of her without saying she was extremely theatrical. She had on a scarlet robe like Juliet's or Madame Butterfly's—or some one's on the stage. Informal, too; her hair hung down in two heavy braids. Her eyes looked sleepy rather than frightened, and her cheeks, without rouge, pale in the afternoon sun.

I know that, in reality, she had been asleep, secure in the knowledge that Bob would be there when she should awake. I know she did not mean to be caught alone in the first-threatened wing. I know that she did not time her appearance for the moment when her last means of independent escape should be swirling with fatal consequences down the river. And yet I hated rather than pitied her for her situation, because, had it been deliberate, it could not have been more ingeniously contrived. I knew even before I looked at Bob.

Bob was not where I had seen him last, and it was a little while before my eyes found him, though he was hardly a dozen feet away from me, already on the ground, dragging at the old skiff which the little man with the imperiled wife had hauled out from under the veranda; his feet already wet with the yellow water which came sweeping along uprooted trees and timber from up river.

"You can't get across there," some one shouted; and I, thinking of the manager, protested, too—something profane, I suppose, since I knew the utter

futility of all words. Of course, Bob didn't hear either one of us. Getting into his boat, he pushed off the green bank with one of his oars, and in another instant was aswirl with broken things swept from the devastated region through which the flood had come down to us.

I can't tell you how long it took Bob to cross the widening stretch of angry water. But I know that, trying to row diagonally upstream, he was being carried down; down past the line of the broken colonnade, always down when he was trying to row up. Some one said he was looking for the body of the manager. But I knew he wasn't—not only because a search were futile. He was rowing for that impassive woman watching him from the balcony.

"If he doesn't get there," I addressed her silently, "you will have murdered him."

He did get there, however, though certainly not as he had planned. I suppose it was when he reached the deeper and stiller water where the creek had run that his boat shot forward under his steady stroking. Anyway, he was rather below the inn, and in the lee of the lesser island on which stood the objective wing. In one moment he was scraping bottom with his boat, and in the next leaping to the narrowing bank, along which he towed his skiff until he reached the veranda. There, with a long rope that must have been coiled, and rotten, in the bow, he tied his craft to a column and called up:

"Mary!"

Not that I could hear.

I haven't any sense of time about this thing; only of slow motion; everything slow except the river climbing toward the foundations of the lower wing—the upper one, too, only I didn't notice that. The boat, bobbing like a cork in the rapids, tugged at the rope while Mary Darrell slowly took her elbows off the rail of the balcony, and, like a creature

on the stage, moved toward a door which I fancied was marked "center" in the invisible manuscript from which she read.

There was another timeless interval before she appeared on the veranda with Bob, gathering her skirts about her as if she were going to step down from her porte-cochère into a waiting motor, or, perhaps, her sedan chair.

"They'll never make it," said a man who stood near me, pointing to a swirling archipelago of timbers, heavy, squared—cross-ties, perhaps—diverted somehow from the main flow of the river. "If she'd only hurry, maybe—"

But she didn't hurry. Not moving at all, she stared down at her feet, in satin slippers. Bob said something—I could see his lips move—and she smiled at him. Then, stepping down upon the narrow sod, he lifted her in his arms and was about to set her in the bobbing skiff when one of those floating timbers struck it squarely on the nose and sent it spinning into the middle of the stream.

Though, as I have told you, I had no idea of time, I suppose now that it must have been five o'clock, or perhaps half past five, when that abominable skiff broke its rotten rope, because the shadow of neighboring mountains had already fallen across the inn. The sky overhead was still blue, but that segment of the horizon visible through the narrow cleft downstream glowed red, and as I shut my eyes upon the image of Bob with that woman in his arms I had suddenly the sense of impending darkness.

Night was coming and Bob was alone with Mary Darrell in the isolated wing of our hotel. I suppose that was the fact which seemed dreadful to me, even as I saw him draw back from the advancing flood and set her again on the veranda—that, and the way they seemed to accept the situation. Mary Darrell sat down in one of the wicker chairs, and Bob, seating himself cross-legged on

the edge of the floor, lit a cigarette and looked dreamily up at her through the blue smoke of it.

I don't think they meant that to be theatrical—there's nothing of the theatrical in Bob—I think, rather, that they didn't know the danger. People rarely do appreciate their own peril, I suppose. So it was we, confident of a superior safety, who watched the strip of green between the flood and the foundations of the wing opposite grow narrower until it was obliterated, and the yellow water touched the concrete pilings; we, who saw the flood eating its way into spring bathhouse and a row of cottages almost level with the lower wing—the cottages were brick, and older than the inn, I think. First the front wall of the larger bathhouse fell out rigid toward the river, and the roof came ignominiously down. The cottages sank slowly, as if they were melting from the bottom. Out in the river, the tight bed of a wagon went floating down, and the body of a mule. I counted eight bales of cotton going by. I recognized the painted lumber of little railroad stations along the way, and, miraculously preserved, the gabled roof of a section shanty with its chimney pot still upon it.

Bob and Mary Darrell could see none of this, because they faced inward upon the quadrangle, and not outward, as we looked. They seemed casual, almost. They talked—rather, Mary Darrell talked. Of course, I couldn't hear the slow drawl of her voice, or, in the gathering dusk, see even the movement of her lips. But I could observe her expressive gestures. Once I thought she was referring to her many-colored robe. Presently she got up and went into the house.

Bob did not leave his seat while she was gone, and the only positive thing I remember as happening over there on the other side before she came back was his drawing his feet up out of the water, in which he found them suddenly with-

out having moved. Over on our side, we were beginning to mill about as if impatient for something to happen. In the lobby, whither I took a nervous turn, there was a strange quiet, so that I could hear a querulous woman's voice begging some one to turn on the lights; then the ineffectual click of a switch and a man's laugh without mirth in it. "Yes, and there's no water in the pipes;" and something about typhoid fever.

It was practically dark when Mary Darrell did return to the veranda, but her gown, black against the weather-boarded wall, told me she had dressed; and a ribbon about her wrist indicated the movement of a hand toward Bob. Swiftly he rose and took the hand, and, keeping it, I thought, went with her into the ballroom where they were lost to me until, across the windows faintly lit by the reflection of the river on the other side, passed their rhythmic shadows. It was strange to see them dancing to the wild and terrible roar of the flood. But I suppose it was something else they heard. No, I don't mean the music machine whose sound could not reach us thirty yards away, but, perhaps, such strains as are audible to those figures on Grecian urns.

I couldn't bear watching them, or even looking at the wing which sheltered them so precariously. It all seemed utterly hopeless to me; if not death in the live water of the flood, then something else which seemed hardly preferable. My own words, "Bob, you can't get away," echoed and became prophetic. This was their high moment, over there in the other wing, and they were having it together. Even the people in the long gloom of the dining room, whither we were herded to consume bacon and eggs and tea, sensed the same thing—they who knew nothing of what Bob had told me—and remarked upon it vulgarly.

People are such animals—you notice it when they merely feed. There was no ice, no service, and they quite let go, as

if, indeed, there was nothing to our politeness but a little consommé and filet mignon. They talked and lifted eyebrows; laughed. "Eat, drink, and be merry," some one quoted; and: "After us the deluge."

"Oh, yes," said a little fat man with a diamond ring who sat at a neighboring table, "she has a husband. You must have heard of Darrell—railroads. Yes, that Darrell. He's in the South somewhere. At Asheville yesterday—or, no, the day before. Thought he must be coming here to join her. Maybe he was. The flood, you know."

Upon such talk as this broke the crash of timber and the fine splintering of glass. Hushed suddenly, and listening, we looked at each other with a wild surmise. It wasn't our wing. It must have been the other one. The mind acts strangely under such stress. I remember wondering if Bob and Mary Darrell had been dancing when the crash resounded, and not at all my getting up and going out on our own veranda. There, in the light of a rising, round moon, I saw across the quadrangle the drunken wing deposed from the eminence of its foundations, squatting upon the flooded ground, water breaking about its sunken end as if this extremity were the huge square prow of a towed barge.

The terrible thing about it all is something I can't tell, because the word I shall always wish to use in describing it is quite wrong. The word, strangely enough, is silence—silence when the whole valley was aroar with sound. And yet, perhaps, if you will only think of Bob and the woman over there with him, you will understand; for it was they who were silent; the wreck secretive, eloquent—you see how contradictory it all sounds when I try to tell it. I mean by "eloquence" the broken balustrades; a great hole in the end wall at the level of the second floor, through which the foot of a bed protruded; a fracture of

the roof; and water—water on the floor of the ballroom.

Did you ever when unhappily dreaming try to call out for help, and hear your own coward voice? You know the sound, then, of the cry I flung over the thirty yards between me and the other wing. I can remember the quality of it without being able to recall the words—or was there only one word? I know there wasn't an answer, because I stopped at intervals and listened. Then, long afterward—oh, ages afterward, though I hadn't moved—I saw a tiny flare behind the broken glazing of a window on the second floor, about where Mary Darrell only a few hours ago had leaned over the balcony in her red and magenta robe; and then a flame, and Bob and Mary Darrell regarding each other across the polished surface of a candle stand.

You will say that I should have been relieved by that, for they were quite safe for the moment. But sight of them thus intimately disposed betokened to my mind, if not the final catastrophe of Bob's ruin, at least its inevitability. Even supposing they yet escaped, Bob could never get away from her after this night of common danger; could never, having incurred the obligations of a rescue, give her back to that other man, the husband who did not love her, "who neglects her, who is cruel to her." Mary Darrell's own words, no doubt, echoed and reechoed. There in the moonlight, listening to the flood I pictured Bob and Mary Darrell, having improbably escaped death, together in some far European pension, Bob pining for his old blue prints, Mary Darrell bored, unhappy; then her lips framing for some other knight, perhaps, the words: "He is cruel to me; save me."

I stood there for a long time measuring the future by the tide and the tide by my watch. It was amazing how the wooden wing held where masonry had melted. Somehow, its yielding timbers

had a tenacity denied to stone. In five minutes the water rose two inches on the weatherboarding. Then for ten minutes it did not rise at all, and I went back into the lobby and sat down in one of the big leather chairs in front of the open fire. I was still sitting there, hours later, doubtless, when the fireplace and the fire simply slipped down and left me. The quenching of the flames under our building was the first I knew of it. But when I looked, there was the blank, rough wall of the chimney confronting me below the mantel.

"Is the water rising?" asked a stout man sitting near me.

"No," said a stroller in a cap who had just come in off the veranda, "it's going down."

The rest of what I shall tell is brief, partly because of the fact that immediately after the settling of the chimney I went to sleep right in the big leather chair. I must have slept a long time, for when I waked the lobby was practically deserted, and, except for a rather peremptorily voice behind me in the neighborhood of the desk, there was a strange quiet, or, rather, the absence of some sound to which I had grown accustomed. I remember that I resented the voice, because it had awakened me, and that I turned glaring toward the disturber, who, I thought, spoke in unnecessarily strident tones.

"Well," he was saying to the clerk, "where is she?"

He was a big man—not unusually large, perhaps, but presenting an unusual effect of ruggedness. In flannel shirt and khaki riding breeches and putties, he was not unlike a colonel on a rampage, I suppose; but to me, in my sleepy stupor, he was a sort of superman, who, somehow, had conquered floods to reach us here. He had, too, as I afterward learned; but even when I came to hear the miracle of his journey down from Asheville, of his traversing high mountain trails, swimming torrents

where bridges were no more, crossing rivers on cables, commandeering horses, motor cars, and boats—even when I learned all this, he loomed never so large again. I think, if I had been the clerk behind the desk, I, too, would have stammered when I admitted that this man's wife was over in the other wing of the hotel.

"Alone!" I can hear the boom of it now.

"No, sir. There's a Mr. Lane."

Silence, then, which was worse. I heard the sputter of a candle on the desk, and saw the face of the man standing before it set in a line and shadow. His words when they came seemed to extend the threatening quiet.

"Over there?" he asked, pointing.

I was standing exactly at his right hand when, surprised, I heard my own voice.

"I'll show you, Mr. Darrell. If you happen to have a boat, perhaps we can get over there to-night."

He looked at me quizzically a moment and laughed.

"You're a friend of this Mr. Lane?" And when I nodded: "Well, you can come along. I imagine Mr. Lane needs a friend."

There was no boat moored to the veranda as I had pictured, and, oddly, no water in the quadrangle. Instead, something like snow shimmered in the light of the descending moon—sand, only white sand, great drifts smothering the greensward, sand in tons, left by the fickle and destroying river. The live water, which had come so swiftly, had departed.

I can't tell you how the sight of this naked sand appalled me—no, not only the desolation of it, but the sand itself; the fact that we could walk dry-shod over it to the other wing; for it was obvious, not only to me but to this rough god who swung along beside me, that, if we could go to the man and the woman on the other side of the sand,

then this man and this woman—— But I wouldn't say it. He spoke:

"You know exactly where they are?"

I started to say yes. They must be where the light was burning. But there wasn't any light. I looked. There wasn't. Not a sign of a light. Had I dreamed the candle? No. The candle had been there, and now it wasn't. But, of course, a candle must burn out. I answered:

"No, I don't know exactly. Perhaps they will hear us and come to us." Then as we stepped upon the veranda: "Darrell, my friend Lane risked his life to get your wife out of this wing. His boat was swept away. They were marooned. They've probably dropped off to sleep—in chairs about, you know. You won't forget he risked his life, will you?"

"I'll not forget," Darrell said, it seemed to me, implacably.

We almost stumbled on them, as, indeed, we did stumble over a log that lay on the floor of the veranda, with grass and sand and old boards.

I don't know why they didn't hear us coming, except that they had senses only for each other. They were sitting on a tilted bench, shadowed by the twisted balcony, talking in low tones. Hearing them, we stopped, and at once their voices stilled, as if our sudden silence had startled them. There was a pause filled with nothing before Darrell said sharply:

"Mary!" Rather like a father speaking for the second time to a naughty child.

She drew her breath in sharply, and my eyes, which had seen no light stronger than a candle, caught the flash of a hand that went quickly to her throat.

"Oh, Jack," she said in her slow voice that sounded husky now, in the chill night, "what are you doing here? How could you get here?"

He answered no word of his heroic

trail across mountains and flood; but he loomed as if he might stride from one peak to another when he said:

"I don't have to ask what you are doing, Mary."

His words should have cut. Somehow they didn't, though. Somehow they held that quality which I had sensed when he first spoke to Mary Darrell. They reassured me, rather than alarmed. But Bob, less sensitive to the nuances of a man whom he, as Mary Darrell's lover, was prepared to hate, stood up between them.

"From now on," said Bob to him who vaulted hills and took rivers at a bound, "from now on Mary isn't answerable to you."

I thought for a moment that the long arm which I saw tightening in its flannel sleeve was going to flash out in a blow; but it only drew back a little, tense; and the man who held it in check strode up to Mary Darrell, stood over her as she sat, a little shrunken, on the down-slanting bench.

"Mary," he said almost gently, "this thing hasn't gone—farther than usual, has it?"

"No, Jack. No, no, no. I just said——"

Darrell laughed and wiped his face with a handkerchief which he drew from the pocket of his shirt, and it was Bob who said:

"You didn't mean it, Mary?"

He drooped a little, because I think he knew already that he couldn't stand against this conqueror of floods; that his own heroism of the afternoon, even the high moments of the night, were as nothing compared to the labors of Hercules; or, perhaps, because of that suggested custom. Who can tell?

I liked Darrell because he turned away. I joined him at the edge of the veranda.

"Lovely night," he said.

On the sands we met my acquaintance of the bridge. The silver star which he

wore on his vest caught the first hint of dawn, by the light of which he surveyed the devastated grounds, the gap in the colonnade, the drunken structure we had left with its tenants of the night.

"Oh, hello!" I said, with that cheerful idiocy which people affect in embarrassed moments. "Looking over the damage?"

He favored me with the preoccupied notice of a man who has many important things to do.

"Hit didn't last long," he said, "but hit shore was live water."

His voice was still in my ears when, a little later, and alone, I found Bob seated beside a candle in the lobby.

Bob had two letters spread out on his knee, and he was glancing back over his shoulder at the clerk who seemed to be answering a question.

"It wouldn't be easy," said the clerk, "but I shouldn't say impossible. A man just made it in. Perhaps you saw him."



THE diamond brooch has strayed from its established position at the front of woman's gowns and may be seen perching on her shoulder, or clasping the folds at her hip, or encircling her hat, but if milady would be original she will wear it centering at the back of her décolleté. Of course it doesn't fasten anything—modern gowns don't fasten—but it subtly suggests the idea of a personal maid, and of utter disregard of the ultimate safety of the precious bauble.



QUEEN ISABEL of Spain, despairing of becoming a nun herself, sent her portrait to a convent, where the nuns in subtle compliment to their queen, repainted the picture to represent a nun. And in doing so they disguised not only the queen, but a valuable Velasquez painting. The painting has just been rediscovered and its sale will aid in the restoration of a Spanish monastery.



INGENIOUS is Sweden's device for saving electricity. Apartment house halls are dark until the lights are automatically switched on when a tenant turns his key in the front door. The lights are calculated to remain brilliant only long enough to light the tenant to the top floor, and so he who tarries must complete his journey in the dark.



SIXTY thousand copies of "Main Street" were sold in Germany, and when Sinclair Lewis received his royalty check he cashed it in London for five shillings, or the equivalent of about one dollar. He should have collected in merchandise—ink, pens, and paper, perhaps.



A CHOICE turquoise of four hundred carats which has for generations figured in the lives of Persian shahs, has been donated to the Field Museum by an Armenian. The gem is about the size and shape of an egg, and is the largest and most perfect of its kind.



YOU may shop with royalty in England, for a red carpet spread before the entrance of a shop indicates that a member of the royal family is shopping within.

His Last Appearance

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The Message of Ginevra,"
"The Dancer," etc.



THE trouble with you, Jessie, is that where other people have a heart, you have a sense of what's done."

"And the trouble with you, Ray, is that where other people have an outlook on life, you have a set of stage directions."

The young man frowned.

"You mean that I'm melodramatic, histrionic? How beastly."

"I mean that you're such a born actor that even when you're frightfully in earnest you can't help thinking in terms of the stage. You don't exactly pose, but—"

"I'm just naturally a poseur."

"Nothing of the sort. At bottom you're a perfectly good, real man, but you are so infatuated with what they call 'expression' that you can't help making the traditional gestures. Look at you—just look! Anybody coming in here now would identify you as the wronged lover, taking up for himself in an outraged but dignified manner. And just because we're having a difference of opinion about the marriage of a girl who's a perfect Hecuba to you—whom you don't even know!"

The innocent bystander might, indeed, have gleaned from the atmosphere the elements of a very pretty lovers' quarrel. He would have been wrong. The interview formed merely one of a succession of friendly spats between a nephew and his youthful-appearing and lively aunt. That was their normal re-

lation, and did not in the least inhibit a pleasant, mutual affection.

The young man thoughtfully regarded himself in the long mirror opposite, a mirror that reflected an interior not very different from a modern stage setting, in its arrangement of long draperies and wide, simple spaces. It was like Jessie to have sacrificed most of the apartment to the drawing-room. Then he grinned as he admitted the justness of the shot. From his whole correct, motionless figure there emanated an implication of protest, of wounded reproach. His rather small, regular features were not distorted; his slim hands and feet were not in action; yet a sort of gentle violence in his attitude conveyed the impression that a sudden poke might send him whirling through the air like an uncaged leopard or a released spring, without any further readjustment of the muscles.

"I see what you mean." The tense figure relaxed. "Sis and Molly used to complain of it bitterly when they had to go around with me. When I was at Princeton, you know, I was a famous female impersonator, and, of course, I practiced, unconsciously, all the time. They used to say that I tried to be svelte in trousers, and it was disgusting. But I've improved since then; I am no longer a perfect lady. I haven't even kept that schoolgirl complexion."

"I have heard them," said Mrs. Archer feelingly. "But when your feelings are touched you still 'express,' even

when they haven't any business to be. What affair is it of yours, if Phyllis is going to marry Monsieur de Mélan-court? You don't even know her, and yet you go up in the air at the very suggestion."

"I know him," said Raeburn Vickers grimly. For an instant the airiness vanished from his manner, leaving him entirely and angrily serious. Then his mocking smile flowed back. "Besides, I like her name."

"Yes, it will be a nice name." His aunt punished him immediately. "Phyllis, Comtesse de Mélan-court. Or will it be only Comtesse Maurice de Mélan-court? He has an older brother, you know."

"Neither, if I can help it," muttered her nephew.

Over Mrs. Archer's excellently pressed face suspicion deepened.

"Ray, don't deceive me. You *do* know her. In that case I can understand your objections."

"Jessie, on my honor, I have never been introduced to the lady."

"You don't object to him simply because he's a foreigner? What have you against him? Now don't look prim and observe, 'Well, really, Jessie, I had rather not say,' or I'll know exactly what you mean."

"Well, I don't care to say."

"If it is anything about women," encouraged his aunt patiently, as though reassuring a Sunday school class, "you needn't mind me. I have been married twice, and I read all the best fiction."

"There is quite a lot of that, besides other things."

"That's a pity," sighed his listener reasonably. "But, if girls waited nowadays for saints, I'm afraid that they'd—wait."

"You don't understand." Raeburn shot at her suddenly. "Women can't see there's a difference. Without having always been a saint a man can be—decent. He can have decent ideas. He

needn't be degraded; he needn't be callous, or mean, or shady, or an egoist."

"And the Comte de Mélan-court is all that?"

Raeburn shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if there's anything really serious," Mrs. Archer regretfully settled the matter, "Phyl's people ought to investigate. But, of course, they have. She has uncles and aunts. I'm only her poor dear mother's friend, but I should hate to have her make a mistake. To tell you the truth, I was rather carried away with the marriage. The historic background and all that. Phyl calls for a setting of feudal castles and cloth of gold and things. But, if the man is really a bad sort—I declare, Ray, I wish you hadn't told me. You make him out like the wicked French nobleman in the American melodrama; he sounds too convincing to be true. You'll have to prove it."

"Don't you know that some things are almost impossible to prove?"

His aunt continued to worry aloud.

"There isn't much time. The whole thing has gone in a whirl. Phyllis is coming to me to-morrow, as I told you. She realizes that there's no use in getting her clothes anywhere except in New York. They're to be married in Washington at Senator Dangerhaugh's the end of next month. She lives there most of the time. If we could delay matters—I suppose he carried her off her feet, but girls so often have a panic at the last moment. Or," added the troubled lady hopefully, "something absolutely damning may turn up about his character. But there's so little time. I suppose we shall simply have to let nature take its course, as they say."

She remained lost in thought, staring down at the vivid angles of the Anatolian rug. When she raised her eyes again to her nephew she gave a start, half of irritation, half of amusement. He was standing in front of the mirror—or was it a well-brought-up

young lady with decorous feet and self-respecting eyebrows? Then, whether by an indiscreet elbow or a hip joint that took risks, the type melted into something more sophisticated. A retraction here, an expansion there, and Mrs. Archer was receiving a contemporary, a marvel of poise, with the atmosphere of the great world permeating a considerable space around it.

"Ray, you are wonderful. How do you do it?" she asked with unwilling respect.

"I'm out of practice," answered Raeburn critically. "How much ear are you showing? I used to notice. A great *Juliet* died in me. Well, I must be off. Ask me to dinner to-morrow to meet her, eh?"

"Give the poor girl a chance to get settled. Come next day."

"Righto." At the small table under the South Seas shell lamp he paused to turn over a pyramid of books. "Anything new in French? By the way, does Phyllis speak French?"

"Not very well. She told me she hoped that the duchesses and marquises with whom she will have to flock are as well educated in English as the hotel maids over there. I said that I doubted it."

He rummaged discontentedly.

"'Autour de la Mariage.' Appropriate but ancient history. Prevost's 'Lettres de Femmes.' Nothing since the ark? All right, I'll take these."

Mrs. Archer was frowningly rearranging the table when the door opened again.

"I forgot to ask. Is she romantic?"

Mrs. Archer stared.

"Ray," she asked searchingly, "what's the matter with you? Did you ever hear of the danger of cultivating obsessions? I suppose you might call her romantic. Southern girls are born that way. Now do——"

"What sort of people—women—does she like?"

"She likes me. Now shut that door, Come in or go out."

Raeburn, with a flying look that his aunt later catalogued as enigmatic, went out. He was a wild creature, but there was something about him to-day that disturbed her. If it had been any one else, she would have been afraid that, under his surface of badinage, he had been in earnest, in gripping and unhappy earnest; that he had really cared.

Late the next afternoon Mrs. Archer returned from a round of important interviews closely connected with Phyllis' trousseau. That young lady, who had arrived during the forenoon, she had provided with a soothing lunch and left sweetly sleeping off the fatigue of her journey in the nicest guest room. As her hostess softly closed the door on her she decided that sweetly was the word. Phyllis' face had the gentle, subconscious smile of one who has looked on beautiful things all her life—things like gardens, and horses, and people who loved her—as Phyllis had.

Some one was in the drawing-room, as the murmur of voices testified, and Mrs. Archer slipped into the tiny library behind it. If she were caught by a lingering caller, she might not have time to dress in her favorite, leisurely way for the evening. A stranger, too; she was not familiar with that careful, foreign intonation. The other voice belonged to Phyllis. Mrs. Archer, as she picked up a magazine and settled herself in a deep chair, could see the girl's charming, long outline against the window lace, a tall vase of roses partly framing her head; and she supposed, forgetting to take into account the more subdued light where she sat, that Phyl could perceive her. The stranger was outside her line of vision.

"You wished to speak to me?" the girl was asking in her pretty way, with a little more warmth in her greeting than Jessie Archer's circle was in the

habit of bestowing on the casual visitor who might want to sell something. The interview, then, was just beginning.

"It is kind of you to receive me."

Mrs. Archer, safe in her seclusion, yawned; then the yawn was, as it were, transfixed in mid-air as the strange woman added: "You are to marry the Comte de Mélancourt? I did not send in my card. Here it is."

Phyllis read it aloud dazedly:

"Comtesse Maurice de Mélancourt." Then her voice cleared. "Of course; you are a relative, of the same name?"

"I was at one time. I was the wife of Monsieur de Mélancourt."

"Was?"

"We were divorced three years ago. He has not told you that he has been married?"

Out of a long pause, as though it had a weary way of disillusion to come, the girl's answer faltered:

"Yes. But I thought she was—dead."

A crisp sound that was not a laugh, exactly.

"On the contrary. I am, as you see, perfectly alive." What was it in the tone that sounded familiar to Mrs. Archer? Was it merely that she had so often heard that delicate sneer in women's voices when the spoke of men?

"It was not"—a dignity asserted itself in Phyllis' lifted head—"the divorce was not through any fault—of his?"

A pause.

"Let us say that there was a lack of understanding on both sides. I prefer to say no more. I did not come to accuse him." Wasn't there something veiled, a disguised sound in the modulation?

The new silence seemed to ask what the stranger had come for. These intervals were quite as revealing as the words of the scene. To Jessie the effect would have been unpleasantly theatrical, had she not known that there could be nothing unreal about Phyl's state of mind. What surprised her was the girl's

gameness in taking the shock, for it must be an immense shock to her.

"I am very anxious to have you understand me," the voice began again. "I came, I may say, out of good feeling, strange as that may appear. Important things so often seem strange to do. *Voyons*. When one takes a maid, sometimes it would save so much trouble to hear a little about her from a former employer. One would escape friction. And, in the case of a husband, one might avoid catastrophes."

"You say," Phyllis interrupted, "that you have not come to accuse him." Something defiant breathed from her. Of course, the traditional thing to do—Jessie waited for the reaction—was to take refuge in loyalty to her lover, to wear it like a crest. Or, remembering modern conditions, should one say like a gas mask?

"I have come as one who sincerely wishes to act as a good friend." A tinge of pathos crept in. "When I consider what I myself was as a girl; out of the convent, the head full of dreams and——"

"Is that your only motive?" Phyllis asked abruptly. Mrs. Archer nodded, delighted. Little Phyl did have a spice of worldly wisdom after all.

"If I have also an interest left in Monsieur de Mélancourt, enough to wish to save him from a second disaster, what is strange in that?" The little quiver had the opposite effect from its suspected intention; Phyllis' answer was resentful:

"You want to warn me, I suppose; to set me against him?"

"On the contrary, I want to plead for him. Ah, wait! But one moment. The time may come—— Then I want you to be patient with him, to make allowances, to be more—more forgiving than I was."

The conscience which had been egging Jessie Archer to slip away, suddenly itself slunk off with its tail be-

tween its legs. She was sure now. And she understood how the girl was being fascinated as a rabbit might be by a snake. This appeal was to the primitive, deepest chord in her nature; almost any woman might have listened. And how well it was being sounded! How awfully clever it was.

"Pardon me," the visitor went on with a change of tone, "I understand that you are rich. Your family has had your fortune settled on yourself?"

"My family has nothing to do with it," replied Phyllis haughtily. "I am an orphan, with full control of my own property."

"No settlement?"

"Certainly not. If I can—could trust myself to a man, I could trust everything else."

Out of yet another pause came a tone like the dropping of ironical water.

"He is still fascinating, then."

Phyllis drew herself up. She half rose, then sank back, as the woman went on, as though now certain that she would be heard to the end.

"History repeats itself. I, also, had a large dot—oh, but very large. In France, as you know, one may be married according to the law of the *communauté de biens*, or the *séparation de biens*. If by the latter, it is very simple, in case of a divorce, for the wife to receive her property back again. Otherwise, it may not be so simple. I, like you, was too proud, too full of dreams, to use the safeguard of the law. However, by the time the divorce came there was little to receive, after all. You will live in France?"

"You mean——"

A rustle, as though the stranger had leaned impetuously forward to forestall accusation.

"I do not mean that he did what was wrong. Not that. But money means so little to him; he has the habit of spending; and he has tastes of such exquisiteness, the true tastes of the

artist. Where another man would work out an inspiration with a brush or a violin, Maurice lives it out, you cannot imagine with what perfection of detail. But all that costs a great deal. Our château—but you cannot figure to yourself what a drain without end an old château can be; and, besides, we had also the Hôtel de Mélancourt in the Rue for René, his elder brother, so we rented it from him. And what a genius in the collection of pictures, fans, bibelots, Maurice has. And for entertaining—our dinners were as famous——"

"But——"

"But, as you would say, there is nothing wrong in all this. The trouble was that before long our income became insufficient." The voice flowed on like an earnest cataract. "One day Maurice said that we must look for better investments, in some new country. A party of his friends was starting for Cochin China, ostensibly for the shooting, the big game, but really to examine into an enormous land company, where they would make millions. He went with them."

"And did they make millions?" asked Phyllis.

"Poor Maurice, he was always so hopeful. At least, they had magnificent sport. The next time it was Algeria. Unfortunately, the good things had already fallen to more experienced business men. Mexico, the South Seas, everywhere; it was agreeable to wander about and collect curios, but that did not help our finances. Not at all."

"And you never went with him?"

Surprise sent the voice to a higher key:

"I? My dear young lady, with a party of gentlemen? Besides, I was not invited."

"So you stayed in Paris—alone?"

"Paris? Why should I waste the money, the crushing expenses of that great house over my head? I went to the country and made economies. That

is a very nice thing to do when the husband is away."

"So you skimped while he was roaming over the world, having a lovely time on your money?" said Phyllis in a hard voice. "Didn't you feel that you were being treated badly?"

"Now you are talking like an American. For generations have we not been trained to skimp at home? A man, he is different. That terrible mistake of young wives, it is to demand more of a man than is reasonable. After all, a man must be the judge of his own actions. The feminine brain can never be the equal of the masculine, because of the smallness of the brain case. I think that is it, or, perhaps, because the convolutions are not so many. I cannot remember; science is not my subject, but I have heard a professor explain it so convincingly. I teach only my beautiful language."

"You teach?"

"Yes, as governess in a charming family. So great a pleasure, is it not, to be associated with ladies? Once I was not so fortunate."

"He lets you make your living by teaching?"

"But why not? I am nothing to him now."

"But," insisted the girl hotly, "it was your money he spent."

"It became no one's money, as I told you. It was gone."

"But he lives—oh, more than comfortably. He lives in luxury."

"Perhaps he has made money lately. He often has marvelous luck with cards."

"Then he ought to give you back what he used of yours."

The answer came with such simplicity that caustic irony would have been less significant:

"One could hardly expect that of him."

"Why did you divorce him?" the girl asked sharply.

The woman sighed:

"I had rather not tell."

"Since you've told me so much, don't you think you owe it to me to tell me that? Was it about—a woman?"

There was an intensification of the voice's reasonableness.

"You are very young, very innocent. I could not make you understand. Try to keep this before you: how exceptional Maurice is, how attractive, even irresistibly attractive, to women. And with that wonderful, irresponsible soul of the artist, and that infatuation for beautiful things. How can one judge him as one judges other men? How can one expect him to bow to their respectabilities and self-controls? I have come to you to-day, my dear young lady—I, who have suffered most through Maurice—because I have so often reproached myself with having been so obdurate with him, so unforgiving. I could not make the proper allowances for him. I came to implore you to be more understanding with him, more patient; to remember when he offends——"

Phyllis was on her feet, a soaring flame of horror and indignation.

"So there was a woman! Don't say another word. Stop! It's the most awful thing I ever heard. You come to ask me to put up with that—to forgive the infidelities that my husband is certain to commit? How dare you—how dare you?"

"But he will come back to you," persuaded the soothing accents. "Always, if you are patient and—tactful, he will come back."

"Do you think I'd have him?" blazed Phyllis. "Do you think I'd have less than everything of his love? You—you say you have come to plead for him, and then you accuse him of the most unspeakable meanness. If I—— Oh," cried Phyllis, wringing her hands, "this is what I call a *nice* visit of recommendation!"

She stopped, paralyzed with amazement.

The soi-disant Madame de Mélan-court stood between her and the arch which opened into the library, her hands spread ingratiatingly, as if imploring a child to compose itself, to accept the inevitable. And behind her unconscious, short, French back, in its quite nice though not ultra-fashionable clothes, advanced Mrs. Archer, the light of battle in her eyes. It was not that so much as its implication that battle would be a pleasure, which at the same time pulled Phyllis' mouth open and struck it dumb. It struck her that her hostess had suddenly gone mad.

Swooping upon the strange lady, Mrs. Archer made a violent attack upon her person. She tore the veiled toque from her head, bringing the large-lensed glasses with it. Then—horror of horrors—she twisted her hand in the neat brown coiffure as though her aim were literally to scalp her victim. During the process she gave vent, in a choked, unnatural tone, to unseemly ejaculations:

"You devil! You wretch! You young imp!"

The last coincided with the shriek of Madame de Mélan-court. Spinning her prey around, Mrs. Archer looked into her face, and turned to stone, as though she had come upon a basilisk, eye to eye.

She was confronting an utter stranger!

For a second both loosed the most extraordinary gasps and gurgles. Mrs. Archer's voice achieved coherence first, wresting a phrase from primitive linguistic chaos.

"Oh," she wailed, "I beg your pardon, I *do* beg your pardon. I *beg* your pardon! I took you for my nephew!"

Even to her own ears the explanation failed in convincingness. Madame de Mélan-court continued to glare. Her vocal morale, however, rallied; a series

of French expressions, too rapid for her hearers to disentangle, poured from her lips. One thing was evident; they were meant to be injurious.

"Oh!" Mrs. Archer began her defense again, then rushed to the doorway as a slim, masculine figure appeared there, entering from the hall. Raeburn was seized and dragged forward. "This is my nephew," panted Mrs. Archer. In the turmoil of her feelings, he, at first blush, seemed to her a deliverer, a ray of light. Then the visitor's expression of bafflement, as though she still failed to understand how it was possible that she should have been taken for that, churned Jessie's consciousness into the suspicion that the newcomer only made the situation worse. She turned on him as on the real criminal.

"Well, it's time you came," she said with blighting sarcasm.

"What have I done?" returned the dazed young man. "I dropped in to leave your books." His glance encountered Phyllis and his voice died away.

His aunt made a gesture of throwing him to the lions.

"I consider this absolutely your fault." She indicated the disaster wreaked on the French lady. "This is Madame de Mélan-court. She has just told Phyllis that she divorced her husband three years ago, apparently for the best reasons. And he has never said a word about it, and Phyllis is furious with him."

A look that can be described only as beatific settled on Raeburn's brow. It seemed to indicate that, this being so, most other things didn't matter.

"And, of course," continued Mrs. Archer bitterly, "I took her for you. You had given me every reason to expect it, with your posturing and your questions and everything. I consider that the least you could have done was not to—to back out, and leave this to happen to me. Why, it was too obvious.

After all you had said, and borrowing those books, I knew it was you. How could it be anybody else?" Her glance passed to the intruder as though accusing her of an unwarrantable liberty in being herself. "I don't see how any fair-minded person could blame me in the least. And, oh, that such an awful thing should have happened in my house! Oh, Madame de Mélancourt, how can you ever forgive me?"

It was at the moment when his aunt's blasting attention was removed from him that Raeburn made the only possible rescue. Catching the stranger's eye, he tapped his forehead with an eloquently regretful finger. The effect was immediate. A gentle sympathy settled on the face of Madame de Mélancourt; she crossed to the mirror and began, with Phyllis' help, to restore her devastated coiffure.

"I understand," she said pityingly. "It has been a mistake." She hastened to add after an uneasy glance to the afflicted victim of brain storms: "A most natural mistake."

Her hands, lifted to adjust her veil, became rigid. Another figure was coming through the doorway, a figure very reminiscent of a Bellini portrait of some swarthy and arrogant noble. His deep-set eyes narrowed, and an unpleasant line appeared on each side of his handsome nose as he recognized her presence.

"So, Suzanne, it is you whom I have to thank for this," he said in French, holding out a letter which he carried in one hand. "It is you who have made this mischief between Mademoiselle Manners and me." Volumes could not have expressed the quality of their married life more eloquently than did the deprecating manner with which his former wife answered him.

"*Mais non*, Maurice. You are wrong. I came to do you a service, if I could."

Driven by the lift of eyebrow, the shrug of shoulder, that announced his incredulity, Phyllis began warmly:

"Madame is right. She——" Then a sharp realization struck her of the reason why this marriage had been a failure. The woman might have every other virtue, but that frugal forehead, that borné mouth, showed how devoid she was of any sense of humor. Otherwise, how could she appeal to Phyllis to justify her by telling—what? That she had implored the girl to forgive the injuries which he would certainly inflict! There was a ghastly comedy about the whole affair.

As the Comte de Mélancourt crossed the room and came closer to Phyllis, his dark, Renaissance face changed to an entreaty that brought back all its charm.

"Mademoiselle, let me see you alone for one moment only. Let me explain whatever calumnies you may have heard against me." She had never seen him so agitated, so nearly uncontrolled, before. "I implore you."

"I don't want to see you alone," she answered coldly. "It would do no good. It wasn't nice of you, Maurice, concealing your divorce, knowing how I feel about such things. However, I sent that letter before madame told me about it. She thought I knew, of course."

Her refusal seemed to infuriate him, to goad him into violence. She could feel his arm tremble as he pressed closer.

"She poisoned your mind against me, I can see that."

"She had nothing whatever to do with that letter—which is final, by the way. There is no use, Maurice——"

In a breath he was no longer the aristocrat, but the Latin of the street, settling his deeply personal grievances on a corner. His face flushed with a wave of dark blood; his chin shot out; his hands came forward into tense circles, the fingers hooked.

"I do not believe it!" he thundered.

Jessie Archer, to the end of her life, was convinced that nothing short of her lightning maneuver in sandwiching

herself between the two men could have saved them all from the shocking sight of a distinguished foreigner measuring his length upon her Anatolian rug. Raeburn's fists had balled themselves, his arm had gone out automatically, narrowly escaping her jaw as she slipped in front of him. She grasped his wrist and forced it down, minimizing the significance of the gesture so that the comte, if he liked, could ignore it.

"Stop! You'll make things worse," she hissed in a hot undertone. Then she turned to Monsieur de Mélancourt, prepared to bring him to his senses also, to find that he had already pulled himself together.

He stopped at the door to bow ceremoniously.

"I see that this is not the time for my explanations," he uttered formally. "I hope for better fortune later. Good afternoon." He retired in good order, leaving behind him the subtle impression that he had been more an injured party than a participant in the trying scene. Jessie gave a sigh of reluctant admiration. These foreign creatures knew how to carry things off. She knew that the man was slinking away, that there was no danger of his wanting to fight Raeburn, but he did his slinking with such an air!

Madame prepared to take her departure. There was real sympathy in her commonplace face as she took Phyllis' hand.

"Thank you for believing that I meant only the best," she said. With a graceful recognition of each person present, she went into the hall, accompanied by Phyllis. Then Jessie sprang upon her nephew.

"Raeburn," she demanded, using the name she chose when she hated him, "did you tell that woman that I was insane?"

"Well, aren't you? Otherwise you'd realize that just what you were wishing

for has happened. She's done with him. Is she coming back? Because if she isn't——"

There was no danger of Phyllis' not coming back. She reappeared under the library arch, standing like a statue of young "Drama," in the pearly twilight that was beginning to invade the rooms. She regarded Raeburn as a beautiful spring tree might regard a tramp who had invaded the grass. A spring tree in a city park; there was nothing in the least rural about Phyllis.

"And now," she asked in a voice of virgin ice, "will you please inform me, Miss Jessie, why you took that strange woman for—for your nephew? What has he to do with my affairs?"

"He can explain that himself," said Mrs. Archer wearily. "He deserves to."

"Well?" Phyllis invited relentlessly.

The young man stood at her mercy. However, out of the most desperate situations arises the highest courage. He did the rashest possible thing, and the only thing that could have saved him. It was one of those rare moments when the bare truth alone is any good at all, no matter where it land you.

Out of his breast pocket he produced a small, flat, leather case, opened it, and handed it to her.

"I've carried this for a year," he said baldly. "I stole it from Jessie, because I recognized the girl I'd seen once in Algiers—the girl I couldn't forget."

Through the tender dusk Phyllis came hurrying to him. Before Jessie had time to touch the lamp, flooding the room with soft light, the girl's voice rang out.

"You? Of course it's you. How stupid of me not to know you before, but I was so taken up with the others!" Then she made the astonishing remark: "I seem to make you feel like knocking men down every time we meet. I tried to find you afterward."

"So did I. In fact, I've never stopped trying."

"We sailed that afternoon. But I knew I'd meet you again."

"So did I."

Mrs. Archer could endure no more. Coming between the absorbed couple, she laid violent hands on both.

"For the love of Heaven," she besought, "what does all this mean? Ray, didn't you assure me that you'd never seen Phyllis, that you'd never met her? Didn't you?"

"No, Jessie, I merely told you that I'd never been introduced to her. I haven't yet. I didn't even know her name until I found the photograph and asked you who she was."

"I'm ashamed of the way I behaved," Phyllis hurried on. "I never ran away from anything before, but I was terrified. I never even thanked you for saving me from those awful men."

"Stop! Stop!" implored Mrs. Archer. "Phyllis, stop right there and begin at the beginning and tell me the story like a Christian. Why was I not informed of this before?"

"I didn't know that nice young man was your nephew, Miss Jessie, and I can't tell you everything that ever happened to me," explained Phyllis reasonably. "It would take too long. Well, you know last year Aunt Harriet took me on the Mediterranean tour, and when we got to Algiers I side-stepped the party one day, because I was worn out by the incessant voice of that talkative guide. I went on a hunt for atmosphere just a little, little way down the most deliciously dirty and mysterious alley, with steps, and archways that whispered, and shops with real native jewelry—not the stuff they show tourists. And, as I've always longed for a really nice nose ring, when an old woman beckoned me into a hole in the wall—in I went."

"Good heavens," muttered Raeburn.

"I gathered from her jabber that she had better things behind the shop, so I followed her into a court with walls

all around and banana trees, and as I heard the lock click behind me I turned round; and there were the two most villainous men you ever dreamed of in your worst nightmares. I made a run for the shop, but one of them grabbed my arm and the other my skirt. And then I screamed. I've always thought screaming disgraceful, but I forgot that, and I shrieked. The next thing I knew, the door burst open and the nicest young man came charging through. I was too excited to know exactly what happened, but it seemed to me that he kept knocking the ruffians down until some of the police came dashing down the alley. And then I ducked through the crowd and ran away like a coward, back to Aunt Harriet and the party. Afterward, when we tried to find my rescuer and thank him he had disappeared. And we sailed that afternoon."

"So that's why I couldn't find you. As soon as they finished questioning me—the police, I mean—I went after you."

Frankly Phyllis held out her hand again.

"It's rather late, but won't you let me thank you now, ever and ever so much? Then I only supposed that they meant to rob me, but it's occurred to me since that they might have meant kidnaping, as well."

"That occurred to me at the time," observed Raeburn. When he added: "Anyway, I've found you at last," Mrs. Archer realized that she stood near a doorway and had better take advantage of the opening.

Nobody noticed her departure in the least. What made this negligence more peculiar was that a silence fell after Raeburn's speech. To him it marked a definite change in his relationship with this wonderful fellow creature, like a gap which sunders one territory from another. One might remain on this side, or one might, by taking one's courage by both wings, make a glorious flying leap into new country. He had lost her

once; he had found her trace only when she seemed destined to marry that other man. Any risk was less than the risk of losing her again.

"Do you believe in love at first sight?" he demanded out of a clear sky. His own voice sounded appalled by the violence of the question, but the girl only lowered her lids as though the subject held no strangeness for her. He might have known that the feminine heart believes always in the immediate recognition of the happiness for which it was born.

"Perhaps you know how it feels," he went on more quietly, "to go on through life, not dissatisfied, but waiting for something more marvelous, more utterly satisfying, than you've ever had—or why are you alive at all?"

"Yes," murmured Phyllis, looking into some country of the air.

"Everything beautiful that comes along seems like a hint, a promise of it, like that red branch that gypsies guide each other by."

"Yes."

"It's heavenly to hear you keep on saying yes, like that," muttered Raeburn. "When I saw you, in that court, I knew that the best had happened to me at last. I had seen you, and I could help you. You don't mind my telling you this, do you?" His voice thickened. "Even if you sent me away, even if you were to marry De Mélancourt after all, and go to the ends of the earth with him, I can't say that I'm sorry for having told you. I'm glad."

"So am I," answered Phyllis surprisingly. She raised to him half-laughing, half-swimming eyes. "I must tell somebody about it, and it seems quite natural—after this—to tell you. Miss Jessie isn't—in the humor, do you think? You know, even if a girl wants to, it's a lonesome thing to break an engagement. It's really not my business whether Maurice was married before or not. I'm not going to marry him. I wrote him so,

in that letter he was holding, and I sent it by hand while Miss Jessie was out. Being away from home made me realize, I suppose, that I couldn't bear it. With him—it would always be like being away from home. He's so different, so hard to understand; I didn't see how I could ever feel—sympathetic."

An overwhelming sense of the delight of life went through Raeburn. He wanted to shout, to fly, but instead he said huskily:

"I'm glad."

"How could I leave everything I knew and go so far away with—a stranger?" pleaded Phyllis.

"You couldn't," Raeburn agreed with conviction. Something like a warm, fructifying breeze passed around them, shutting them into a thrilling space of their own. The girl's head lifted like a young tree crest; her smile held shyness but no surprise. He held himself taut, afraid to say any more; not daring to hurry her, to startle her spirit, which was coming so surely toward him. With a gulp of wonder and thankfulness he realized that there was no doubt in the world that she felt at home with him.

She did, because she was looking, as she had all her life been accustomed to do, into eyes that loved her.

Mrs. Archer found Phyllis, after Raeburn had gone, sitting motionless in her chair, staring, as Jessie expressed it, at day after to-morrow. Jessie was still young enough to have retained a tolerance, based on a mixture of awe and envy, for the vagaries of youth. Against all her principles, she consented to go alone to the bridge party where they were both expected, and to bear Phyllis's excuses.

"You've had a long trip and a trying afternoon," she soothed, but Phyllis was beyond caring whether her face was saved, socially, or not. She leaned her head against her friend's kind arm, rubbing her lips over it like a child.

house, saw the door open and a slender figure dart down the steps and into a waiting car. Half a dozen thoughts, mutually contradictory at that, ran into his brain at the same instant. Where was Phyllis going, all by herself, at this time of night? Of course Mrs. Archer had sent for her to join her somewhere. No, she had changed her mind, and was on the way to meet De Mélancourt, why he couldn't imagine. The memory of her venturesome excursion in Algiers surged through him. Was she doing some such reckless thing again?

At that critical moment the time and the place and the passing taxi occurred, for a miracle. Raeburn signaled to the last and said in as commonplace a tone as he could command:

"Keep that car ahead in sight, will you?" A reminiscence from fiction he had read caused him to continue: "Double fare."

The man grinned and touched his hat. Probably he was a reader of fiction, also, or had had some experience of the vagaries of well-dressed, wild-eyed gentlemen in the nighttime.

"Where to, sir?"

"All the way," replied Raeburn.

The man hesitated, then started the car. It was at this hour comparatively easy to follow his directions. The dinner crowds had passed, and the outpourings from the theaters hadn't begun to litter up the streets yet. The way led north. After a while Raeburn's dominant feeling was one of devout thankfulness that he had obeyed his impulse. It must not be supposed that he had spent the evening gazing sentimentally at the building which enshrined his divinity; such conduct, in any city less romantic than Seville or Verona, is likely to attract the attention of the prosaic police; but he had walked considerably out of his way in order to pass the house as he returned home from the club. It was heaven's own

luck that he had. Certainly, wherever Phyllis was going, it was not to any evening entertainment in town. They were leaving the granite roadway behind, and other roadways; they were crossing a bridge. Trees lifted their tops to the bright starlight; they were on a country road. A wild dread that he might be pursuing the wrong car assailed him, then vanished.

His own car slowed up and stopped. Raeburn was out of it as soon as the driver, and prodded him impatiently.

"What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

The man straightened and answered in a surly, defensive growl:

"If you'd said you were coming this far, I'd have told you the gas might give out on us. I didn't know you were bound for Canada. Got barely enough to make that filling station we passed last."

So that was why he had hesitated on hearing his orders, hesitated and taken a chance. Raeburn's hand clenched, his mouth opened; then by a jarring effort of will he controlled himself. He couldn't risk antagonizing the man; he would need him later.

"Go back and fill up," he said, biting the words off, one by one. "Here's where you'll wait for me, over there under those trees. I'll make it worth your while. Wait, if it takes all night. Have you a flash? All right, give it to me." He put a bill into the man's hand—not his full fare, but a substantial earnest of future benefits—and watched him turn the motor and drive off.

His last view of the fleeing car had seen its lights flash sharply to the right and vanish. Doggedly trudging on, he came to a private road, branching from the highway, and losing itself among trees. The flash swept over freshly made traces of tires, and Raeburn followed them into the grounds of a handsome but lonely-looking country estate.

TO BE CONCLUDED.



Eyes of Greed

By Nancy Cabell

Author of
"Lorna of the Dunes," "Golden Windows," etc.



IV.—THE KISS OF TOSCA

THE dressing room of the great Guardos was in a state of upheaval. Her costumes—a gorgeous mêlée of many-hued brocades, of fabrics simple and ornate, of imperial, begemmed robes and peasant kirtles—lay piled upon every chair. Her wigs and her shoes and her jewels, all taken from their cupboards, were heaped wherever one turned. And still her silent, sullen-eyed dresser took new splendors from the cunningly contrived wardrobes that lined the walls of the room, laid them out, curiously lifelike by virtue of the puffings of tissue, with an almost vindictive touch. A length of spangled silk caught on a hook, and tore with a protesting sound as she wrenched it down. The singer, marooned before her dressing table, saw the gesture in the mirror, followed the gaunt, black-clad figure with her eyes as she heightened the rose of her full, lovely mouth to a scarlet that the footlights could not dim.

"Careful, Gina."

"You will not wear it again!" the dresser murmured. Her voice had the low, curious timbre of a stringed instrument out of tune, hurt beyond repair by a careless hand. That note is often found in the voices of those who have suffered from some throat affection.

Elena Guardos sighed, laid down the blue stick with which she made more lustrous her dark, full-lidded eyes.

"No, but I have worn it!"

The dresser folded the winglike sleeves.

"It is true that the clothes we have worn, the rôles we have played, are unforgettable."

La Guardos flung her beautiful body back in the chair, considered her over-emphasized loveliness somberly. This was her farewell performance. For tomorrow, though only she and Mallory knew it, she was to become the wife of the financier. She knew that she should be elated, triumphant. Instead, she was permitting herself to sentimentalize over the close of her operatic career.

"Our clothes become a part of us. You have left something of yourself, madame, in the folds of this gown."

The bridal robe of the tragic *Lucia* was in the capable, needle-roughened hands of the maid as she spoke. One felt that those hands, strong and slender, were contemptuous of their tasks, rebellious of service. But they knew those tasks well.

Elena Guardos shook off the curious sense of depression that enveloped her; laughed. Her laughter was beautiful.

"Then you should handle it with more kindness, Gina!"

She thought, in the ensuing silence, that this sullen serving woman was one of the symbols of her stage career which she would be most pleased to dispense with. Poor Gina! It was natural, Madame Guardos supposed, that she should hate the woman who had suc-

ceeded her. For Gina Angelotti had once promised to be the most scintillant star of the operatic stage. An accident, and the attendant nervous collapse, had muted the lyric soprano forever. And for the past four years the once noted, now penniless and all but forgotten, prima donna had been reduced to serving her successor in the capacity of dresser and maid.

There was a peremptory knock on the door.

Gina laid down her work.

"It is Mr. Mallory, madame."

"Richard! Come in, while Gina does my hair!" the soprano invited.

Richard Mallory picked his way cautiously through the piles of raiment as Elena swept a chair free of its glittering burden and beckoned him to her side. She was beautiful with her dusky hair drawn back from her temples, beautiful in grease paint, with her mouth reddened to the likeness of a fresh wound in the pallor of her oval face, and with her eyelids heavy with blue pigment. But he was fiercely, possessively glad that after to-night she would never sit before the three-paneled mirror, a gorgeous kimono sliding from her bare, unconscious shoulders, having her magnificent dark hair twisted upon her head, while he or any other man sat at her side, watching the completion of her toilet. He told himself that her profession had given her to the world. That he, her fiancé, had less claim upon her than had her manager, her baritone, Fernando Llouba, who, rumor had it, had discovered her a decade before, and had made her the great artist she was. When Mallory had found that he loved her, desired her more than he had ever desired anything—and he was a man who took infinite delight in achieving his desires—he had faced the issue squarely. He wanted to marry this queen of song. He and she were too big, too honest, to be satisfied with anything less than that. And

he knew that her marriage was inconsequential to her public. But had he the right to demand that she give up her career? He knew that he had not. It was she who said:

"We haven't spoken of my profession, Richard. Will you be content with the rôle of—a prima donna's husband?"

"There are certain disadvantages attached to marrying a great singer," he admitted, "but I'm willing to concede whatever I must in order to be—your husband!"

He had lifted her hand to his lips; had made her wish, for an instant, that a little of his courtliness might give way to fervor.

"The concession isn't necessary. I have always said that when I married—if I married—I should give up my career. I sing *Tosca* for the last time on the twenty-third."

She had kept her word. And, although he did not speak of what was running through his mind, he exulted secretly in the confusion of open trunks, gaping closets, of silks and velvets, and paste jewels, that filled the close, glaringly lit dressing room with varying, heady scents.

"I've brought you your wedding gift," he told her. "I hope it pleases you."

He laid a narrow, white-leather case, tooled in gold, upon her littered dressing table. The white fingers of Madame Guardos pressed the catch eagerly, and the satin-lined lid flew back.

"Richard! You darling!" Her golden voice was vibrant with delight as she gazed down at the exquisitely set emerald pendants. She lifted them reverently from their quilted bed, held them to her ears. The stones were enormous, oval shaped, and of a fiery beauty almost malignant. They swung against the round white throat of the coloratura glitteringly. "They're more beautiful than they were in Chartier's window!" she exclaimed. "And how wicked!"

She narrowed her beautiful eyes at him, laughing softly with pleasure. Neither of them saw that the woman Gina was gazing down at the winking green stones, as if they had been hypnotic eyes fixed upon her own.

"You are the legendary sort of person who lends beauty to any jewel she may wear," Mallory told her abruptly. "These things sparkle, come to life against your flesh! Pearls must grow luminous, more milky, about your throat."

She inclined her head.

"Nicely said, *mon ami*! Poor jewels, do they mind-passing into my hands, I wonder? Emeralds that an empress has worn must be scornful of lesser glories."

"Catherine of Russia was only a woman—and an empress; you—are Elena Guardos!" He reminded her dryly. Was that why he had pursued her so doggedly for the past two years, she wondered? "But I am delaying you. I have disobeyed you in one thing, Elena. I have told my sister-in-law that we are to be married to-morrow. She and my brother will share my box to-night. She begs that you'll let me bring you to her house to-night for supper."

Elena the magnificent quelled the triumph that touched her rose-red mouth.

The hour was full, perfect. This small triumph was sweeter to her than bursts of applause, burdens of roses. For Mallory's sister-in-law, ugly, clever, vitriolic, possessing an English title of distinction in her own right, had a great deal in her power. And the fact that her sister-in-law to be was an opera singer of fame meant no more than a deeply unfortunate *mésalliance* that would be spectacular as well.

"I shall be very happy to come," Elena told him, and hid a smile. She, Elena Guardos, coloratura soprano of a thousand triumphs, who had sung at the pleasure of kings, was permitting

herself to be taken up by a fashionable matron, patronized, accepted! That was amusing. But after to-morrow Elena Guardos would cease to exist, and Mrs. Richard Mallory would be needing the support of her husband's people. "And now, *chéri*, you had better leave me. Let La Guardos make the whole world remember how she could sing!"

A little embarrassed by the somber presence of the maid, Mallory took Elena's hand. He had borne it to his lips when they were interrupted. He turned in quick irritation as Gina admitted the famous baritone. Lloub, an heroic figure in white peruke and dark velvet, took cognizance of the tableau swiftly. Mallory, who had never seen him save across the barrier of the footlights, took an instant dislike to the man. The heavy make-up was not solely responsible for the predacious, sensual mouth, the bold, covert eyes. At Madame Guardos' formal introduction he bowed insolently.

"I have seen Monsieur Mallory many times this season in his box. The opera attracts him?"

The man was hostile.

"Very much—when Madame Guardos sings," said Mallory.

Elena looked gravely at the intruder.

"I must tell you, Fernando, that Mr. Mallory—that I have promised to marry him."

Lloub flecked an invisible speck of dust from his lace ruffles.

"Which explains the breaking of your contract—this year of leisure you demanded?"

Mallory felt that more than the mere announcement of her marriage was taking place. The atmosphere was tense. Even the maid, Gina, whom he disliked vaguely, stood waiting, brush poised above her mistress' head. Her black, darting eyes rested upon his bewildered face for an instant, sped with a curious, covert sort of triumph to Lloub's.

She seemed to exult in the discomposure he was striving to conceal.

"I shall never return to the stage," said the great Elena Guardos simply. She was not a woman of a great many words. But she sensed Mallory's wonder. "Signor Llouba gave me my early training," she told him quietly. "It was he who first discovered that I had a voice."

Llouba flung out his soft, too well-kept hands.

"And was it for this that I trained you, made you?" he demanded. "To see you throwing away this great gift of yours at the zenith of your career? You are a fool!"

Mallory's temper was rising. But Elena was mistress of the moment.

"You forget, Fernando, that Mr. Mallory does not understand the artistic temperament. One who did not might easily find you more than discourteous."

"I do!" said Richard Mallory. "And, as you are speaking to my future wife, I cannot permit it."

"Richard!" She turned upon him, and he glimpsed her leashed fury at the other. "I beg you—go! Remember that I must sing to-night. I must be left in peace. Wait, Ferdinand!"

She sprang up from her low-backed chair, slipped her arm through her fiancé's, and led him to the door.

"I cannot endure this discord," she told him swiftly. "It is not all applause and splendor, my life." She grimaced. "But after to-night, Ricardo—Come to my dressing room after the performance. I wish to slip out quietly, and avoid the crush."

He found himself in the musty corridor.

Elena Guardos stood against the closed door, and faced the baritone angrily.

"I might have foreseen this!"

He showed his great white teeth in a snarl.

"To think that I did not! This mar-

riage shall not take you from me—from your career. I did not make you, Elena mia, for that puppet's pleasure! No!"

"You forget yourself!" She flung wide the door. "I won't have this forced upon me. I am waiting for you to leave, Fernando."

He seemed suddenly to recall the presence of the hovering, sullen dresser.

"A more private conference would please you better, no doubt. Leave us, Gina."

His heavy white hand came down upon her gaunt shoulder, urged her toward the door. And, though her mistress countermanded the order furiously, she fled.

"I hate you!"

Llouba laughed deep in his bull throat.

"I know that! It does not displease me. Your wrath is more brilliant than another woman's pleasure."

She stamped her satin-shod foot; wrenched away from his hands.

"How dare you touch me!"

"How dare I? I dare a great deal, Elena, where you are concerned. But you—you are timid, like all women, in spite of your temper and your bravado." He laughed again under his breath. "For example: you have not told this Mallory much of your student years in Vienna and Dresden, no? I thought as much."

"He is not concerned with them."

"I might make them his concern."

What he did not say was more poignant than his carefully weighed words. The magnificent Elena Guardos caught her breath.

"He would not care!"

"We shall see!" He was a mocking, evil figure in his plum color and laces. Elena brushed past him to where the gown she was to wear during the first act lay, ready for her.

The distant music of the overture

sounded from the pit. The shrill whistle of the page summoning the players for the first act repeated itself at intervals in the corridor outside.

Elena Guardos snatched up the brocaded gown, and vanished behind the tall screen. As she fumbled with the intricate fastenings Llouba paused before her dressing table.

The twin jewels glittered magnificently. He weighed them in his thick, white hand with a sneer.

"Your cavalier is lavish, eh? I wonder, Elena mia, how lavish with your favors you would be in return for my silence, my—coöperation?"

She swept out, ready to go on. The passion of the rôle she had created surged over her. A woman of love and song, a *Tosca*, desperate, fierce, almost menacing in her defense, faced him.

"I have endured much at your hands, Fernando. Will you never learn that you cannot drive me too far? I swear to you, I will not let you destroy this chance of happiness! I do not make empty threats——"

"So you threaten!" he jeered.

In the suppressed violence of the moment neither of them heard the shrill summons. She did not take her grave eyes from his evil, avid face.

"I am going to marry Richard Malory."

"I am not sure of that!"

"No one in the world shall stand in my way. Fernando, you have called me ruthless; I am! I'd trample your dead body under my feet if it lay——"

"Madame!" The small, sleek manager burst into the riotous room. "Santa Maria! Do you not know that you go on in five—in three minutes? This is no time for anger! Hurry, I beg of you!"

She picked up her skirts; sped so swiftly toward the wings that she did not see the shrinking figure of her maid.

The stage manager pressed a silken handkerchief to his brow.

"These artistes! They are vixens, wildcats. Believe me, Llouba, you would be wise not to anger La Guardos! She does not love you overly. When you lie still beneath her dagger on the stage I've seen a look in her eyes——" He laughed.

Llouba nodded.

"You are quite right. She's a tigress. She'd leap at my throat, if she had the chance, and take pleasure in it!"

The manager laid a wise, plump finger coyly to his nose.

"It does not do to play too fast and loose with women, *mon ami*. They will stop at nothing for love of such a bold brigand as you, yes?"

Fernando Llouba swaggered in his plum-colored finery; threw out his deep chest. And the two men left the room.

Gina Angelotti stepped from the shadow, laid a hand on the big baritone's arm.

"Fernando——"

He shook off her hold with a word, brusquely spoken, and hurried toward the wings. The lyric beauty of *Tosca's* voice in her scene with her lover in the cathedral filled the house, was audible and clear behind the stage. Gina Angelotti stepped into the empty, disordered dressing room of the star, stood against the closed door, one thin, raised hand beating out the tempo of the song. Her worn lips framed the liquid words silently—words she knew so well! Perhaps she fancied herself giving vent to that golden melody, before a thronged house. Then she opened her eyes upon the close, hot room, and went about her task.

Before the end of the first act she had closed the last trunk; made the dressing room neat and bare of all its splendor. She moved to the dressing table, where the forgotten emeralds still lay in their filigree settings. Her roughened fingers lifted them, held them to her ears, hidden by the smooth black coils of hair. Once she had worn

emeralds, but the intolerable brightness of jewels is not kind to pale cheeks, worn features! The woman who had worn such baubles gazed hungrily at the stones her palm cupped. How like Elena Guardos to toss them down, forget them! But, then, they were only an added tribute to her, who had opened her white arms to all tribute! Elena had everything. Youth and beauty and a voice whose glory she was denying after to-night. The woman who could never sing again struck her thin, quivering throat. Tears of envy, of futile fury, burned in her somber eyes. Two jewels such as these, that lay forgotten on the dresser top, would mean more than tribute to her! They would mean life and joy, in some measure, again. And they were Elena's, who had exclaimed over them—and left them there among her rouge pots!

They burned in her memory as she unhooked the flushed and breathless singer who, after the ovation following the first act, had barely ten minutes in which to change her gown. Elena, still nursing her anger toward Lloubà, was impatient of the maid's stiff fingers.

"You're clumsy to-night, Gina—all thumbs! And that devil will be here."

"He is a devil!" said Gina Angelotti.

Elena remembered old legends. He of the undying voice had sung his famous *Scarpia* long before her star had begun to burn on the horizon. He had known the young Italian singer during her brief glory. But she had no time to ponder upon the women who strayed across his path. She did not intend to see him again that night! Under her make-up her cheeks burned a fiery rose. Her dark eyes glowed feverishly. It was sweet, this last triumph—perhaps all the sweeter because it was her last. He should not spoil it.

"If he comes—" She laughed and flung shut the door behind her.

Gina Angelotti folded the blue gown that Elena had worn for the last time,

and laid it away. And then she turned once more to the littered commode, where Elena's reckless hands had spilled powder upon the emeralds. Her needle-pricked fingers closed hard upon the chair back. She stared down at the jewels until she saw nothing but the fire of their green depths. As if she gazed into a crystal that burned and clouded and then presented vistas of desire, she looked closer. She saw a hillside near Florence, flanked by vineyards whose sweet breath still lingered in her nostrils; and on the hillside a small villa, its yellow stucco burned pale by the glorious Italian suns. She saw all that she most missed, most yearned for, in that brief enchantment. And then she saw the emeralds, glowing under her hands. A dry sob burst from her lips. She drew nearer. The enticing green fires burned like a grail of greed. The blessed Virgin would surely understand, and forgive her. She snatched up the jewels, cupped them in her shaking hands, and was about to thrust them in her bosom when she glanced in the mirror. It framed Fernando Lloubà, who stood in the doorway, watching, smiling.

She choked back a cry. He approached.

"Thief!"

When life has broken man or woman the victim shrinks from the symbol of the rack.

"Fernando!"

"So you steal from your benefactress, eh?"

She spit out the term in a torrent of vindictive Italian.

"Give me those jewels."

"Dio, no! I will replace them, Fernando. I was mad with jealousy. But do not betray me. You would not do that—not to me, to Gina—"

He stared at her contemptuously, and shook off her feverish hold. Was the woman attempting the wiles of that other Gina Angelotti, who had been

young and beautiful so long ago, but whose wiles had not prevailed even then when he had wearied of her tempestuous favors? He was angry, and it pleased him to relieve his spite upon the nearest object. A bully by nature, he took a curious delight in the cowering of the supplicant.

"Shut up! Do you think you can conquer me by tears? Bah! The emeralds, I say!" He had thought of an amusing scheme. If he should show the jewels to this Mallory as Elena's gift after he had flaunted them before her as the price of his silence—

He had barely a moment in which to formulate the decision, but he found it pleasing. He put out his big hand, and wrenched the earrings from her.

"Fernando, I beseech you, have pity!"

"I'll think about it!"

He moved to the door. She flung herself upon him; shook him feebly.

"You cannot be so cruel. It will mean prison for me, do you understand?"

"Don't keep me here!" He thrust her from him. "I've no mercy for thievery. Let me go, you fool."

She uttered a hysterical laugh.

"You to speak of mercy!"

The entr'acte music was coming to a finish. The page boy was calling him. He stuffed the jewels into his velvet doublet, and as her desperate hands clutched at him he did a hideous, brutal thing. He struck her across the mouth, and a thin trickle of blood ran down her chin. With a muttered imprecation he took himself off.

Gina Angelotti, to whom the final degradation had come, sank slowly into a chair, and bowed her head upon her clenched fists. When she looked up, and stumbled to her feet, her white face was that of a Fury. She crept down the corridor, meeting no one, and paused near the property room. She crossed herself in the musty dark.

"Make me strong, *Madonna mia!*"

On the other side of the thin, dividing set of *Scarpia's* apartment, the man she hated was singing his lust and treachery.

The Opera House was crowded to the doors. In the long double tiers not a box was empty, for the last appearance of the great singer had brought out the world of fashion as well as that of music.

Richard Mallory sat behind his sister-in-law, Lady Mary Mallory.

The second act under way, in which the glorious cantata is sung in the queen's apartments while *Scarpia* is questioning *Cavaradossi* in his own. But in spite of the great baritone's fame the whole house was waiting for *Tosca* to enter in this, her greatest scene.

"She is very beautiful," murmured Lady Mary as the young singer entered the apartment, and ran to her manacled lover's side.

Mallory, who had watched her fling herself into the arms of many a tenor, sighed his assent. He was still exulting in the fact that to-night was the last of her public appearances. But he could not help experiencing a pang of regret that so glorious a voice was to be taken from the world. He felt almost guilty as he glanced around at the spellbound house.

The great second act was proceeding to its terrible, splendid climax. *Tosca*, tricked into the apartments of the unscrupulous *Scarpia*, sees her lover taken into the adjoining room, not dreaming its dreadful import, seats herself with affected nonchalance while the baron questions her.

Lady Mary leaned forward as *Tosca* tottered to her feet at *Scarpia's* apprising her of the tortures to which her lover was being put in the next room.

"Magnificent! One would fancy that she did hate and dread the man. Oh, I can't bear this scene, Richard!"

She unfurled her fan, and looked away as *La Tosca* besought her lover's life in piteous strains, and heard his anguished cry from the rack.

"It's too hideous to be played or sung."

Even Mallory was shaken when the tortured *Cavaradossi* was brought out and laid upon the couch, after his beloved's betrayal of his friend.

"The worst is over; you can enjoy the rest of the performance," he told her.

The great scene progressed.

Tosca, kneeling beside her spent and broken lover, tells him that he has not betrayed his trust, and the baron orders his officers to search the hidden well.

The tense house relaxed slightly at the end of the aria between *Tosca* and her lover when he is taken away, and then settled forward for the last magnificent scene between the singer and *Scarpia*.

Llouba sang his audacious song of love across the supper table with such vehemence that the glamour of life itself was shed upon the unreality of the scene. His desperate, final appeal was barbarously more than an operatic aria. His open arms, his pursuit of the shrinking singer, was played so wondrously well that the audience sat there in the thrall of utter silence.

"That man is madly in love with her!" Mallory heard his sister-in-law murmur.

"They are both magnificent actors," he told her under his breath. "He—I met him to-night, by the way—no more loves her than she hates him."

"Exactly," whispered Lady Mary mischievously.

The doomed singer made her exquisite, soaring plaint to Heaven after repelling the amorous *Scarpia* for the moment, and her golden notes filled the hushed house of song.

Her bitter consent gained, for the price of her lover's life, *La Tosca* sank

despairingly to the sofa, drawn against the tapestried side drop. She watched him intently as he seated himself at the near-by table, and wrote out the safe-conduct pass. Slowly she rose; approached. As she raised the wine glass to her lips, set it down, Mallory found himself watching her every gesture with bated breath. As she seized upon the knife, and hid it in the folds of her gown, she looked upon the man so near to her with a malevolence that was dynamic. Did she hate him, Mallory wondered? And did he—

Triumphantly he sprang up, arms outstretched, to clasp her to him.

"*Ed ora, Tosca, finalmente mia—*"

What a voice the full-throated baritone had! It took no stretch of the imagination to see in him the amorous, fierce lover who would stop at nothing to gain his ends—and the woman he desired. Mallory found the scene a little naked. But that, of course, was Elena's art, and his.

He thought she plunged the dagger into his breast as she would have done had the scene been a reality. He shuddered a little at her triumphant pæon. This was the kiss of *La Tosca*!

The dying man's curse rang out as if he were truly choking with his own blood. He fell, and dragged himself to the sofa; struggled there an instant against the tapestry while the implacable *Tosca* bent over him. Her terrible burst of song as he expired, groaning, came to an end. She had turned away; was looking about her for the safe-conduct pass he had written. During that moment of silence no one breathed. Mallory, who knew the opera well, waited, hardly breathing, for the moment when she would chant her forgiveness, now that her enemy was dead, and place the lighted candles at his head, the crucifix upon his breast. But first she must wash the stains from her hands, arrange her hair—and find the pass. The audience was pitched to an

hysterical sort of silence. Not a rustle of a program or libretto was heard throughout the house as *Tosca* moved to her victim's side, having perceived the pass in his outflung, apparently stiffening hand. One felt that the end should come soon, that the quivering crimson curtain should drop upon these horrors. She drew near, with dragging steps; bent above the dead man. But no plaintive burst of song passed her lips. Instead she uttered a terrible cry, and dropped to her knees beside the dead *Scarpia*.

And then the curtain fell.

"An innovation," murmured Lady Mary.

The lights sprang up all over the great house. After a bare instant the orchestra leader in his cave motioned with his baton, and the entr'acte music dimmed the ripple of talk that eddied through the parterre. Mallory frowned.

"It's odd that she should omit that final aria."

A woman in an opposite box caught his eye, and he bowed to her. Some friends of Lady Mary's strayed in upon them. As they chatted a rotund little man in evening dress slipped through the crimson curtains, and held up his hand to the orchestra leader. The house was hushed expectantly.

"Messieurs—mesdames, I must crave your indulgence. There will be a slightly longer than usual delay before the next act, owing"—he moistened his lips furtively—"owing to the unfortunate, but slight indisposition of Signor Llouba."

And then he bowed himself off.

"Mr. Mallory?"

Twenty minutes had passed in the pleasant intimacy of an opera night when an usher entered the Mallory box, and handed Richard a note. He excused himself, and read the terse summons swiftly. A single line: "Please come to me at once. Elena," was

scarcely reassuring. As he followed the usher out and downstairs his pulses quickened. Was it she who was indisposed? Or was she merely overcome by Llouba's sudden illness?

He found himself in the musty reaches behind the scenes, and suddenly upon the stage itself. Bewilderedly he stared at the tableau that was enacting itself in the unchanged setting. Llouba still lay upon the settee. Elena, lovely in her white gown, still stood leaning against the supper-laden table. The drama seemed, in its strange continuity, to have become endowed with life—or death!

For beside the recumbent *Scarpia* knelt a man with a stethoscope, who rose and shook his head at the other occupant of the false chamber. This last man had an official air, and he was jotting something down in a notebook.

"Death was practically instantaneous!" said the doctor.

Mallory brushed his hand across his brow.

"What does it all mean?" he demanded.

The pale, rotund little manager appeared, gesturing imploringly.

"Quietly, gentlemen, quietly, I beg of you."

"It means," said the official of the law in low tones, "that during the last five minutes before the curtain went down this man was stabbed to death."

Elena Guardos clasped and unclasped her hands.

"I can't understand," she murmured. "Everything was as usual until I came to the sofa and bent over him; and then—I found him bleeding, dead."

"During your last scene with him you stabbed him before a packed house," said the official. "The most unique murder that has ever been known, I dare say."

Mallory stepped to her side.

"And who are you?" the officer demanded.

"A friend," said Elena Guardos. "But you're all mad. I didn't kill him."

"I have the honor to be the fiancé of Madame Guardos," said Mallory gravely. "My card——"

Captain Cate's manner changed.

"You see how matters stand," he said apologetically.

"I don't," Mallory took the singer's cold hand and held it reassuringly between both of his own. "The thing's impossible on the face of it. How was he stabbed?"

"In the back. The weapon——"

"We found under him." The doctor shrugged.

Elena shrank from the blood-covered knife.

"That is what has always been used in this scene," she told them dully. "I stab him—so! We've played it together a hundred times and more. The knife goes under his arm, and stays there. I tell you everything went as usual—and he was stabbed in the back. You must believe me!"

"The whole thing is preposterous!" Mallory said excitedly, and was hushed once more by the distracted stage manager, who turned to the accused singer dramatically.

"She has done it. She threatened him in my presence just before the performance. Oh, this is monstrous, unspeakable! My reputation, my audience!"

In the flies stood a subordinate of the officer in charge, followed by the maid, Gina.

"The dresser, Gina Angelotti, amplified that. She overheard them quarreling. Madame Guardos threatened him."

"There's only one thing to be done," said the official in charge apologetically. The manager flung out his hands.

"Signore, I beg of you! You will not ruin the performance, cause a stampede. I have announced only the indisposition of Signor Llouba. His

understudy is here, waiting to go on. Have your men remove the body to his dressing room."

Mallory led the woman he loved to a chair; shielded her vision from a glimpse of the still figure that was borne off the stage.

"My dearest girl!" An engulfing wave of tenderness for her swept over him. Curious that he had never felt quite like this toward her before! She was no longer the imperious, the magnificent. Her splendor had fallen from her in her peril; left her a figure of pathos, a woman endangered, forlorn. He thought dazedly that of all the adulating throng only he remained at her side. She seemed to understand.

"If you weren't here—— Ricardo, you shouldn't have come. I shouldn't have sent for you. But I felt so alone. Why did you tell them we were engaged? Think of the story it will make for the papers! And you hate publicity!"

He didn't answer that. He was listening to the strained evidence of the maid.

"How she hates me!" murmured Elena. "What will happen now, Ricardo?"

"It will be all right, Elena. Trust me!"

The whole thing was so incredible. "You're—sure that the knife did not slip? If it did, it might be wiser——"

He barely whispered the words; she shrank back in horror.

"Ricardo! No! No! I tell you!" She was ghastly under the rouge.

"May I take Madame Guardos to her dressing room?" demanded Mallory. "The strain has been too great for her."

"Very well. Go along, Moynihan."

The music of the orchestra must have dimmed every sound from the stage to the audience, yet there was the murmurous rustling in the pit. Perhaps a consciousness of tragedy had come over the jeweled, beautifully dressed throng.

"Just one thing: I have the dead man's hotel address, but no one seems to know much of his private life, his family. They should be notified."

Elena Guardos stood straight and still.

"He has no family. There is no one—to notify."

Cate scrutinized her.

"You're sure of that?"

She nodded.

"Quite sure. For I was—his wife."

"His wife!"

Mallory stared at her in amazement. She smiled.

"I divorced him six—seven years ago. His religion does not recognize divorce. He has always been very bitter toward me for it. But I was very young, a student, when I married him."

No one guessed that the announcement was of the faintest import to Mallory.

He left the police to their informal investigation, and led her away.

"If you'll find Gina," she murmured in dismissal, once in her room.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked gently. "Do you think that would have mattered?"

"I could not be sure."

"You can be very sure that nothing on earth really matters except that I love you!" he told her, and knew it to be true.

He found himself in a labyrinth of corridors and dressing rooms. The chorus, the stage hands, and actors, were huddled together on the stage, undergoing a rigorous questioning. The woman Gina had been dismissed by Cate after her disconnected story. Mallory, on the other side of the thin partition that formed the death chamber of the dead *Scarpia*, overheard the manager protesting at the brusque order to curtail the performance and send the audience home. Where had Gina vanished to, he wondered?

A slightly open door confronted him. Inside, some one moved softly across

the light. Instinctively he flattened himself against the wall and peered into the room. It was the dressing room of Llouba. And on a narrow cot lay a sheeted figure. He saw two hands draw down the sheet, fumble in the still, velvet doublet. Good Heavens, what had he stumbled into?

A faint sob sounded in his ear, and the half-open door widened to let a gaunt, feminine figure slip through, and race down the abandoned corridors. It was Gina! Why had she been in the dead man's rooms? He followed her.

Fear itself seemed to wing her feet.

"Gina!" he called imperatively halfway down the short, twisting flight that separated them. She turned with a gesture of defense, and he knew—he alone while the other blockheads conducted their stupid inquiry on the stage.

She was making for an exit. He called to the policeman who was stationed there; she wheeled and sped past him toward the stage itself. He heard faintly the manager's voice beyond the curtain dismissing the audience with a thousand regrets and apologies. Signor Llouba was too ill to reappear that night. The box office would refund their money.

Only the thin wall of *Scarpia's* chamber guarded the fleeing woman from the representatives of the law. Mallory, gaining upon her, reached out and caught her closed fist. She struggled like a wild thing.

"Dio!" she cried in that hushed, whimpering voice of hers, and fought him off. "You shall not have them, signor. Between the two of them, they owe me those paltry stones." He felt some hard, sharp object in her hand; saw the emeralds he had that day bought for Eléna! How— He stumbled over something that lay in his path, and she wrenched away from him. He stooped to pick it up, and found his eye level with a small slit of light in the canvas wall—a slit such as a knife

blade might make. The wet, sticky knife that had made it lay on the floor, where a desperate woman had flung it!

Cate had heard the hurrying feet; he blocked the passage.

"That woman——" Mallory told him breathlessly. "You'll find a slit in the tapestry behind the couch—the knife is here, behind the scene."

She gave a shrill cry, just beyond reach of both men.

"I, who have stood listening in the wings for a thousand nights—do you think I do not know just how he drags himself upon the sofa, how he falls, ready for my knife?"

Her laughter was a terrible thing.

The rest was kaleidoscopic. Mallory saw her dart in desperation, not upon the crowded stage, but before the velvet curtain, with Cate in pursuit. He saw the massed, moving house stand silent, agape. The orchestra ceased to play. Gina Angelotti, with escape cut off at either end, saw a confused panorama of startled faces—a great audience, awaiting her. He never forgot the little gesture of acceptance she made, as if to applause that only she could hear. And then came a tragic, beautiful flood of sound that seemed to petrify even the gaping officer in the opposite flies. Gina Angelotti sang once more the aria she had not sung for fifteen years:

"Ah! e morto! Or gli perdono——"

Now that he was dead, perhaps she had forgiven him! Then she remembered as the men who threatened her freedom, at a signal, came closer. She looked about her with a hunted expres-

sion, and, still singing, raised her clenched fist. Very few people saw that she flung something into the heart of the crowded theater. But a few remembered afterward that twin stars of green hurtled through the air and fell—just where, no one knew—as the gaunt, glorious-voiced woman in a maid's apron and a shabby black dress was led off the stage.

The two who were most concerned were not interested in what became of the two emeralds. And the audience itself forgot them in reading of the dramatic affair, and of the death of Llouba. But two people were very much interested in the valuable baubles. One of these two was a gentleman of title and turban from an Indian principality that has given many of its royal youths to Western colleges. He was the guest, that night, of a dowager who had a predilection for princes of almost any creed. By the merest chance one flying stone landed in his silken lap, to be blandly dropped into the folds of his sash. The other person who did not underestimate the interest of the lost jewels, was a pretty, eager woman in the parterre, who was surveying her charming features in the lid of her silver vanity case just before the dramatic episode. When she closed it with a beating heart, she closed it upon a single, gleaming emerald, beautifully mounted in platinum. And then she looked about with her neighbors, wondering where the jewels had found a resting place! But these two, after all, are not concerned with this story.





THE SCREEN

By Frances O. J. Gaither

Author of "City of Jasper," "Cousin of the Moon," etc.

THE porter was not really inquisitive. But he had that sense of being his brother's keeper which is sometimes vouchsafed to those who serve the public. He knew exactly at what degree distraction in a traveler becomes ominous of the catastrophe known as getting left. So he could not pocket his impressive tip, or even reassure the beautiful girl about her beautiful luggage, without prodding her a little.

"Oh, the bags'll be safe enough. The bags is all right. I'm seeing to your bags, miss. If I say I am, I am, and that's all there is to that. But hadn't you better think twice before you leave the dock so close to sailing time, miss?"

She regarded him dumbly.

The dock showed dark and lofty, not unlike the nave of a cathedral. The color of the light was like, surely, purple shadows of sheer vastness; and, if one did not look too critically, as the beautiful girl and the questioning porter didn't, the steel girders threading the roof hinted of lacelike carving. The paint and brass of the *Barataria* gleam-

ing in sunshine at the farthest boundary of purpled shadow suggested in some sort an altar. Offerings of flowers and fruits arrived momentarily and were taken in charge by porters and stewards as intent as acolytes. Nor were the travelers and the friends who had come to wish them bon voyage dissimilar to a throng of punctual worshipers. The hour before a liner leaves is a fervent hour. Some vision of other, more glamorous, worlds steeped in wistfulness the gaze of those who are about to sail. Some hint of the pain of mortality veils the eyes of those who have come to say good-by.

"I'm responsible for the bags, miss, but—do you realize how little time is left? Less than an hour. If it's something you've left behind"—and he guessed it was by the visible urgency of her—"wouldn't it be a lot safer to telephone back and have 'em send it by messenger? You have left something?"

High in the maze of steel that suggested marble fretwork, sparrows beat their wings. The girl's hands in faun-

colored gloves clung to the folds of her faun-colored wrap. Though her eyes were very wide, the porter had the impression that she saw nothing about her—not himself, surely; not the cathedral-like shadows, or even the shining flanks of the ship she had avowedly come to sail on; not the people bustling past her, or the sparrows flicking the bars on the dock-shed roof.

"Left something?" the girl said in the voice of a somnambulist. But the very sound of words startled her out of her abstraction. "No, no," she said quickly. "I have left nothing—at least it isn't that I want. Just mind my bags, please. And call a taxi for me as I asked you. There. That one those people are getting out of."

"Eleven thirty, remember, miss. You think you can make it?" pleaded the porter dismally as she rolled from his presence.

The subject of his misgivings tapped on the glass of the taxicab he had put her in and spoke to the driver. The driver had had a bit of experience himself. He didn't definitely calculate that her faun-colored costume with the bits of brown leather cunningly stitched on it was costly. He didn't consciously say: "Here is a rich fare." He merely, as he put it to himself, knew a lady when he saw one. Who better? He turned deferentially, therefore, and spoke across his shoulder.

"Yes, miss. The Ambassador. No? The Plaza?"

"No, no!" Her voice whipped by his ear. "The Battery. Not a hotel at all. A park. The Battery."

He repeated the strange direction correctly, registered her white intensity as evidence that she might be indifferent to an overcharge, shrugged, and gave his attention to the sunlit cobblestones outside the twilight shed.

Circumstances proved the taxi driver sagacious no less than the porter, who shortly would begin to scan in vain the

face of each new arrival at the dock. The young woman put down at the Battery did not want to be waited for. Palpably she shrank from even the question. She wanted the taxi driver to leave her there. She wanted it so intensely that, asked for twice the amount written up on the indicator before her eyes, she paid without a word of protest and gave a larger than necessary tip besides. Glancing back as he drove off, the taxi driver saw her actually sit down on a bench beside an immigrant woman.

The immigrant woman turned and looked at her new neighbor. She gently drew the not-too-clean folds of her black dress away from possible contact with delicate-hued flannel. But the girl was too absorbed to thank her. The woman saw the girl look at a tiny, jeweled watch under the cuff of her gauntlet and then at that part of the Hudson which to their vision lay just beyond the Aquarium. The hour and the Hudson were of paramount interest to the immigrant woman, too. The sun of early June lay equally upon the girl's exquisite slenderness and upon her own billowing, uncorseted curves. So when, in the river beyond the Aquarium, showed three red funnels slanting, plumed with smoke, the girl caught her breath in a queer, strangled way, and the woman overflowed into speech.

"Ah! Mother of God. It is she. It is the *Barataria*. She carries my son. Two months he will be gone; three, maybe. There is no sorrow like the sorrow of parting. You know, too, you who watch as I do—you who suffer; you have said good-by to a brother, maybe; a father?"

"I know no one on board," declared the girl, and walked away.

She did not look back at the foreign peasant woman, perplexed to the point of checking a sob. Nor did she glance again at the ship slipping down the river into the bay. She walked very rapidly like a person in flight.

She permitted a second taxicab driver to overcharge her, and then a young salesman in the leather-goods section of a great department store to sell her the most expensive bag in stock. The salesman, finding her indifferent to an amazing degree, really selected the bag with an eye to her obvious station; but aloud he said she would like this particular bag because it was inconspicuous. The word somehow caught her attention. She echoed it twice. After that he couldn't have prevailed upon her to take a cheaper even if he had tried, which, of course, he didn't.

"What address?"

"What address!" She echoed that, too, but distressfully.

"For delivering the bag, madame. You do want it sent? You do not wish to carry it?"

"Oh, but I do. That's just it. I do want to carry it. I have—lost my luggage. I need it at once. I must have it now."

She paid for it as eagerly as if her purse were a magic wallet which could never be drained. She bought other things in the same store, things to go in the inconspicuous bag: brushes, a comb, underwear, face cream—all the small necessities befitting such a bag. And, still employing taxicabs, she eventually stood in the lobby of a small hotel in Eleventh Street.

The clerk, whose professional skill was far and away superior to the modest hotel which it pleased fortune for him to serve, gave her one glance and then, in a tone which subtly was both deferential and protective, both discreet and authoritative, suggested for her rooms where he was sure she could be quieter than anywhere else in the city. He didn't mention that he was offering her his most expensive suite, and she—fifty, he thought—didn't ask. With one hand he rang for a bell boy and with the other whirled toward her the open register.

Her eyes lifted to his, startled.

He kept his own gaze level and trusting, compelling her at last to strip off her glove, take the pen, and write. When she and her bag and the attendant bell boy had disappeared in the elevator the clerk reversed the ledger and read what she had written. He shook his head and pursed his lips over the round, almost schoolgirlish pot-hooks. But then, remembering her beauty and her perfect apparel, he smiled delicately and laid his blotter on the signature he believed fictitious. After all, it wasn't his business what her real name was. His business was to make the guests of the hotel comfortable, and then to collect remuneration for so doing. His distinction consisted in doing just that.

There is no telling how long the girl would have continued in possession of the quietest suite of rooms in the city, dispensing largess to the various servitors who tended her wants, going softly in and out at meal times, if it had not been for the old gentleman in white spats, who on the third morning for the third time rose from his chair in the lobby at the identical moment when the girl stood waiting for the elevator.

He was a dapper old gentleman in creased, gray clothes, sparkling linen, spats as aforesaid, and a perennially fresh pink rosebud on the lapel of his coat. The third time he rode up in the elevator with the girl, his small eyes glittering and shining upon her, he spoke to her in what he felt to be a pleasant, seductive tone of the niceness of the weather, asked if she found it a pleasant time to be in the city for shopping and sight-seeing. She nodded, yes, but her eyes dilated as in terror. And in five minutes she was back at the desk demanding her bill.

She had her purse open when the clerk named the amount she owed. It was impossible to guess what occasioned her start of surprise: the announced

figure; or the discovery—inevitable of course—that she held no magic wallet; or the question dawning in the clerk's eyes: "Is it possible you cannot pay?"

"That's quite all right," she hastened to reassure him. She pushed three bills across the desk. "No, thanks, I don't want a taxi. I can walk."

The next student of human nature into whose ken the girl came was Mrs. Bailey. Mrs. Bailey lived in a high, red-brick house in Chelsea. Mrs. Bailey exhibited between the lace curtain and the glass panes of her first-floor windows a small, neat sign reading "Furnished Rooms." In this Mrs. Bailey was not individual, since almost every other house in the block bore a similar sign similarly placed. But Mrs. Bailey's house was the last in the row, and the girl, having tried all the others, maintained she could go no farther.

"I'm very tired," she declared, and looked it, drooping against the wrought-iron rail of Mrs. Bailey's stoop, "and it's late; nearly dark. Couldn't you just this once not insist on references?"

"What is your name?" asked Mrs. Bailey. "Can you pay a week's rent in advance?"

"Gertrude Johns," said the girl quickly, and at the same time extended fifteen dollars toward Mrs. Bailey; two bills it was, a five and a ten. Mrs. Bailey, afterward called upon to reconstruct circumstantial details, recalled that fact specifically. "I'll not be the least bit of trouble. You'll see."

Not the least bit of trouble—ah! It was on that echo afterward that Mrs. Bailey's lips were apt to twist.

Now Mrs. Bailey was as good a soul as ever lived, albeit she had had her share of bitter experiences directly traceable, she felt, to her trusting nature. And, challenged afterward to tell what she knew of the girl Gertrude Johns, she was very apt to dwell to the point of boredom upon that moment the girl had come to her out of the mysterious

dusk, drooping and shrinking like a flower on a broken stalk.

Evidently Mrs. Bailey liked better to remember that moment of her most reprehensible gullibility than those later irreproachable moments wherein she accumulated evidence that her secretive lodger had not money or job or, as Mrs. Bailey briefly put it, connections. How did Mrs. Bailey know? Oh, she had not had eyes given her for nothing, or intuition, either. When the cheap, black dress appeared and costlier clothes disappeared by degrees, and Mrs. Bailey, dusting, found a growing number of pawn tickets under the dresser scarf, how could she help knowing? When Mrs. Bailey's paper was borrowed daily, and returned with the "Help Wanted" pages missing, Mrs. Bailey would have been nothing short of a fool not to deduce that it was not a job but the want of one which took her young lodger away every morning and sent her home more wearied and more wide-eyed every night.

And, I ask you even as Mrs. Bailey asked the police reporter, would not Mrs. Bailey have been, under the patent circumstances, rather more than human not to have served notice?

"I kept her till her time was up and three days more besides," said Mrs. Bailey. "What more could I do?"

"Nothing, I'm sure," said the reporter politely. He sat in one of Mrs. Bailey's mission chairs and looked up thoughtfully at the most striking ornament in her sitting room: the picture of a lion framed realistically behind actual steel bars as big as one's little finger.

"I give her every chance to talk me around—it's an old weakness of mine, being talked around. I called her in here whenever she come in of an evening, and asked her questions. I'd ask her fair enough: Any luck to-day? And you know she could have told me she'd found a job or had the prospect of one, anyway. Or connections. She could

have told me she had connections. I practically suggested it that last time I questioned her. I hinted around for connections before I give her notice. But she only shook her head—she was sitting in that chair you have, looking up like you.”

The reporter stared. He groped for the end of Mrs. Bailey's narrative.

“Then you gave her notice, and she——”

Mrs. Bailey shivered.

“In twenty-five years of keeping a rooming house,” she declared, “overtrusting as I am, it's the first time ever I had to put in a call for Spring 3100; the first time ever the patrol wagon drew up at my door. Suicide!” cried Mrs. Bailey, shaking as if in a chill. “Suicide. And her so young and innocent looking. I couldn't go in there. I couldn't. The smell of the gas waked me, but I had to wait for the police to open the door.”

There is in heaven one corner that looks for all the world like a bit of the Westchester hills. A girl discovered it. Fragrance first hinted the fact to her, drew her subtly up out of an ocean of horror. The odor of despair is hideous, overwhelming, and yet, like the odor of gas that faintly but incessantly haunts the corridors and rooms of cheap lodging houses, whispering, whispering unmentionable things.

The fragrance of heaven, or, at least, that part of it which looks like Westchester, is mostly compounded of roses. Floating on that fragrance one may arrive at a green lawn lying in the elbow of a curving road close pressed against the breast of a beautiful hill. A stone wall and a thicket inclose the lawn and hide it from passers-by. On the lawn a wedding is being prettily consummated under an apple tree.

The bride's toilette and the toilettes of her attendants have not wholly the bucolic simplicity of china shepherdess-

es, or the theatrical sophistication of Trianon dairy maids, and yet they have something of each. The bridegroom's appearance suggests that he might be just going out for tennis instead of getting married: informally clad in flannels, fresh shaven and ruddy, blond hair smoothed, lips parted in an ingenuous smile.

Dud! The bridegroom's name is Dud, or Dudley. There is nothing remarkable about him, perhaps. But every bit of him as he stands there getting married would suggest to any onlooker the phrase “nice boy.”

The bride thinks it and when he fumbles the ring flashes him a smile.

The bride's heart is singing—as a bride's heart should sing in heaven. It goes on singing and singing even when they have all left the apple tree and she stands with Dud and her mother and father on the little tessellated terrace under the wistaria vine and gives her hand to one person after another of all those who drift across the green lawn toward her. The girls and women wear delectable colors: rose and orchid and yellow, with hats like flowers. The shifting tints of late sunlight touch them and melt the colors one into the other.

The bride is in a confusion of ecstasy. The only thing clear is a silly phrase singing in her heart, and a fragrance. “Nice boy, nice boy,” and the smell of roses in her arm.

The bride's mother says for the twentieth time:

“Indeed, we don't intend to be lonely. We couldn't bear the house without her—just at first. By the time they sail tomorrow morning we'll be well started on our way North. Driving. Oh, yes. Driving in June is delicious.”

The bride buries her too-ecstatic face in a mass of white roses, and tries not to hear the talking. But the fragrance, heavenly as it is, can't go on keeping voices out. They break through by little and little, persistent, unending.

gave confidence instead of asking it. Her rough friendliness stole warmly around one's heart. And the green bur-lap screen, thin as it was, offered the sheltering secrecy as well as the purging of heart which the confessional offers. The screen was like a confessional.

It happened, therefore. To the straining sympathies of the woman Carrie, who was what she was, were presently presented the nuances of sensitiveness in a delicately bred girl upon her wedding night.

The girl told of her wifehood briefly, as that estate had been brief.

But when she came to the end of it, when she told of her agonized self bidding farewell to illusion, some misgiving, vague and inexplicable, undermined her speech. How did that four-line, good-by note miss the tragic plane? Was it dragged earthward by the immemorial notes of runaway wives? But other runaway wives are erring, while wronged virtue had guided her pen to write: "A dreadful mistake—discovered in time—the least you can do is to let me arrange when and how my family and friends are to know—better to go off somewhere hunting while I go on our honeymoon journey alone—"

The story broke off confusedly. Alice stared at the screen. She suddenly found it too thick. Her eyes strained to pierce it. Her ears strained, too. It was almost as if the screen really were a confessional, as if she were mysteriously fearful she might not be shriven—she who was not at fault!

"That's all," she said eagerly. "That's all. I left him lying there, breathing with his mouth open—ugh!"

"Poor kid."

"It was hard for me. I found I couldn't sail. I simply couldn't. I went to the dock, but I—"

"Oh, it was him I meant. Think of him wakin' up, with a head, and findin' a note like that. Poor kid."

The girl was too amazed to speak.

She could only stare at the screen. Here was the strangest thing of all; yes, even stranger than that she should have told her secret; some subtle change must have crept over her wedding night in the telling. That pit of hours, heretofore intolerable to look into, now that it was told of, seemed, even to Alice, suddenly—

Well, at least, the question began to dawn: was it the blackest, the deepest of all pits? Blacker than fear, deeper than remorse?

Her story mysteriously shrank from epic proportions when the disembodied voice of untold experience called Dud a poor kid. Dud! The echo of commiseration for Dud hung in the silence folding down on two sides of the screen. The comical echo, "poor kid," recalled another silly phrase, "nice boy," and became confused with it.

In the effort to present Dud to the understanding of a woman whose own lover was a hairy-handed stoker named Joe, half tones must have slipped into the picture, neutral tints blurred even Dud's sin.

"I never want to see him again. Never." The girl's cry rose sharply toward a sob. "I couldn't bear to. Nothing you can say will change that. Do you hear?"

Came a crooning, soothing:

"There, there, dearie. And who was goin' to say anything about seein' him? Not me. Not Carrie. Of course, with me it's different. I've had so much experience with 'em sober and drunk. I do want to see my Joe. Now I've found his ring, I can hardly wait for him to get back from the sea. He's a stoker on the *Barataria*, did I tell you?"

"The *Barataria*!"

"Uhm. And don't I miss him when he's gone!" On and on, idly of the half-world, looking fondly to Joe's return to-morrow to find on Carrie's finger the ring he had given in earnest of his determination to make of her an honest, mar-

ried woman. "And won't he be ashamed of usin' fists on a poor girl that's only lost his ring behind the sink under a scrap of soap?"

On and on.

If the way from a lawn in the Westchester hills down to the port of missing women is long and fraught with travail, the way back again is toilsome, too. It is not to be accomplished in a breath as such things happen in dreams. Nor can one escape travail even at the price of sacrifice on the part of one's friend. One's friend in wistfulness may make light of the difficulties: "A girl who hasn't made a slip can always go home. A married girl can go home easy." But Alice, mounting the steps of home at the languorous hour of two upon an afternoon well along in June, drew a sigh that was plaintive with weariness.

One by one she had, like any pilgrim under penance, put the milestones of her ordeal behind her since morning: thanking Carrie through the screen: saying good-by; dickering with a pawnbroker for a loan upon an incredibly large and indubitably yellow diamond—Carrie's ring, tied in a handkerchief and tossed over the screen to Alice—dickering for dollars when dear knows the true value of Carrie's ring lay in this—that it was guarantee of Carrie's happiness, and now of Carrie's trust in Alice. But the dickering took place, nevertheless, and the ring remained at last in the pawnbroker's palm and a thin sheaf of bills in Alice's.

The next milestone was braving Mrs. Bailey. Mrs. Bailey was a tougher adversary than Mrs. Bailey's lion, if it could come alive and, roaring, wrench its bars apart. "Sure, I saved your pawn tickets, Gertrude. And, yes, that's all you owe me: seven-fifty. You have heard from your papa then. You have got money from home. First time I saw you I said you was a girl that had connections. No? It was lent you by

a friend? You're sure you're right taking money from a friend? Hadn't you better open your heart to Mrs. Bailey and let Mrs. Bailey advise you whether your friend is a proper friend for a young girl?"

Next milestone: another pawnbroker. Next: a dressing room at Pennsylvania Station and leaving the weeds of Gertrude Johns behind, emerging in faun-colored flannel with bits of leather cunningly stitched. Next—Carrie had insisted on this segment of the penitential way—a hotel in Eleventh Street and meeting the knowing eyes of a clerk; hearing: "Certainly, madame, I will let you go up and look, but I assure you, if any jewelry had been left in your rooms, it would have been turned in at the desk before this." Next, the suite which had been a means of teaching her hunger. Next, climbing upon a chair to feel along the molding above Watts' "Hope" for a tiny, platinum circle engraved with orange blossoms; extravagantly tipping the functionary who watched her find it.

Next, the dock; seeing the just returned *Barataria* shine like a burnished altar through a shadowed cathedral; wondering what Joe, a stoker on that ship, would say if he could peer into her purse and know what had been pawned to replenish it; wondering ridiculous things while people hunted up the porter who could identify one and release the long-held, beautiful luggage, luggage of a bride.

Alice, on the steps of home, emptied her purse in the hand of the taxi driver who put down her bags. And then she sighed before she rang the bell. She sighed heavily because there are so many painful miles between the far country of prodigals and the green lawn of home drowsing now with such sweet, unconscious languor.

And even now she could not stay. She must get money shortly and travel back to keep a tryst with Carrie, whose happiness had been put in pawn.

Alice rang.

She pretended not to see the astonishment of the maid who admitted her.

"My mother and father have not come home yet? Not till to-morrow! Oh——"

"There's a message from your father just come; a telegram. We were wondering how to answer it. It's good you came, but we'd no idea you would. Not for ever so long."

The telegram spoke of engine trouble and a day's delay for the motorists. It further read:

Home to-morrow. Wire me here whether you have forwarded messages or letters from Mr. and Mrs. Van Horn.

The yellow sheet drooped in Alice's fingers. Mr. and Mrs. Van Horn. That was Dud and Alice. Oh, daddy, daddy!

Etolia, the maid, lingered, puzzled eyes on the luggage.

"You're staying, Miss Alice? Shall I order dinner for you and Mr. Van Horn?"

"Dinner? Oh, I forgot to say Mr. Van Horn isn't coming out, Etolia. He is—detained in New York. I'm staying, of course. But not for dinner. I have to go back to"—the truth of keeping tryst with a woman of dim reputation in front of a cigar store in Second Avenue was so much stranger than fiction that Alice barely hesitated—"to meet friends for dinner. But I haven't had lunch. You might see about tea and sandwiches for me. And, just a minute, Etolia—which of you is in charge of the housekeeping? I'd like to borrow a little cash for the afternoon." She tried to make it careless, and curiously she discovered it was easy to be careless here, easy to speak to a servant coolly of "thirty or forty dollars." Even Etolia was careless, echoing the larger alternative, echoing "forty," a bagatelle between friends. "And I'll attend to answering my father's telegram, Etolia."

"Yes, Miss Alice."

The canopy of the apple tree laid a shadow on the grass; the little tessellated terrace at the end of the veranda shimmered under the stirring shadow of vine leaves; and the quiet slope which the hedge and the invisible stone wall shielded from the road and passers-by lay as if it might be dreaming illusory, beautiful things.

She was still under the apple tree, still trying to decide how to answer her father's telegram, when Dud came. It must have been getting dangerously late then, but the telegram had bewildered her to start with and then Dud's coming——

Etolia, the maid, tripped out through the terrace and down the lawn to announce him.

"Mr. Van Horn. Shall I ask him to come to you here or——"

No time for hesitation with the maid's eyes on her. She said quickly:

"Here." And she didn't move. She stood as if rooted under the tree where two weeks ago she had married Dud. But when she heard his feet in the grass she lifted her eyes and stopped him two yards away from her.

"You come here," she began bitterly, "although the one consideration I asked was to be allowed to arrange about telling my family——"

"Oh," he interrupted, "I knew they weren't at home. I telephoned and found they weren't expected till to-morrow."

"Then why——"

"I came to see you, Alice. Something told me you'd get back to-day. Call it intuition." She made an impatient gesture, and he added: "Well, of course, anybody who reads the papers would know the *Barataria* docked this morning. But wasn't it intuition to guess you'd be on her? I have loved you so long, Alice. I know you better than you know yourself. I knew you'd go no farther than Southampton." She tried again to interrupt him, but again

he hurried on: "I don't mean I've been sure of you—of—your forgiving me. I was sure only that you'd come back and give me a hearing, Alice. A girl like you couldn't do anything else."

He had circles under his eyes. It was only two weeks, but he looked years older, somehow. His cheeks were just as ruddy and his hair as smooth, but that shining look was gone. One missed that shining, "nice boy" look. Regret for Dud's lost boyishness unaccountably ached in Alice's throat.

"I will hear whatever you wish to say, Dud; but there are things talk can't change."

She sat down on the bench built around the tree trunk, and Dud stood in front of her pushing his hands down in his pockets, frowning, stammering. Echoed as through a screen, "poor kid."

Out of Dud's stammering speech emerged a picture of Dud loafing downstairs on his wedding night for a smoke avowedly, but really to—to leave Alice by herself a little. Alice stared at him, and the intolerable pit yawned between them, the pit of those hours through which alone in a bridal suite at the Ambassador she had waited, waited, waited. She stared at him now so flushed and wistful, and tried to see him rather as he had been when he had wavered in at morning, bleary, disgusting, maundering endearments. She tried to remember Dud as he had been after staying out all of their wedding night; tried to remember him coming in too drunk to sail away on their honeymoon; too—too—sodden for one intelligible word of atonement.

"I'd rather be any sort of rotter than the kind of rotter that won't carry his sins on his own shoulders," said Dud beneath the apple tree; "still—" His stammering drew a picture of his friends Paley and Grimes, loafing, too, meeting Dud, full of glee at meeting him, pommeling his shoulders, wanting to drink his health, making it a point

of manliness in the Benedict to have his health drunk—once, twice, three times. "I guess I lost count pretty soon. They saw to that. Hard for a girl to understand. Rough, practical joke. They thought themselves pretty funny."

"Funny? Ah!"

She strained to look into the intolerable pit, but her shoulders felt the familiar roughness of the tree that had sheltered a thousand bright hours from Grimm's fairy tales and dolls to cooling off after tennis with Dud, and to their young, young wedding, herself in a shepherdess frock hugging roses. All about lay the gilding of sunset. Bright ghosts moved over the lawn: a bride's attendants like Trianon dairy maids; wedding guests wearing delectable colors, rose and orchid and yellow, with hats like flowers. Echoed a drifting, singing phrase: "Nice boy."

"No use trying to tell you what I've been through—just hell—but what'd a girl know about that? No use saying I didn't mean to do it. How could a girl like you understand getting drunk; understand everything kind of slipping from under, getting fuzzy, losing track of time—"

His wistfulness had the pull of undertow. Alice, avoiding his eyes, looked down at her wrist watch. She started. She was Cinderella hearing midnight chime. Dim and featureless as a figure in a dream, some one called Carrie, only Carrie would wait in vain at an almost unimaginable trysting place.

"Dud! Dud!"

She could not leave off shivering even with his arms around her.

"Can we wire daddy we both turned back from Southampton—say I was seasick, homesick—anything to keep them from knowing?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"And can we ourselves never look back at this two weeks? Never, Dud?"

He was parting her fingers to kiss them one by one in that dear way he had.

So he swore it five times on to the last solemn never at the tip of her thumb.

It would be hard to conceive of a place more unlike the charity ward of a hospital than "Evelyn's, the Shop of Distinction," wherein young Mrs. Dudley Van Horn found the perfect gown to elicit a whistle of delight from her husband at their first anniversary dinner. Yet it was in "Evelyn's" that young Mrs. Van Horn, who had sworn never to look back, did look back. The matter of trying on the gown being concluded and its golden folds across the saleswoman's arm having just disappeared through the door of the mahogany cubicle, Mrs. Van Horn turned to put on her street things. In that moment she was reminded. She saw coarse sheets, an iron bed, a vista of white ceiling, one wall, and a screen; most of all she saw a screen like a confessional where one could pour out one's heart and be cleansed.

The mahogany partitions in "Evelyn's" really are more like screens than walls. They are hardly higher than one's head. The voices of two who had just entered the adjacent cubicle came over, easily distinguishable. They were, of course, the voices of a saleswoman and a customer. They debated the width of a hem. But Alice Van Horn, hushed to listen, heard not so much words as disembodied wistfulness.

"A couple of inches, Mabel? Well, I sure don't know myself. Of course, me bein' tall like I am—" It was she. It was Carrie. "Say, Mabel, what about gettin' a fitter to come look at the hem and see?"

A door opened and closed. Mabel was gone for a fitter. Silence folded down on two sides of a mahogany screen. Then Alice Van Horn was talking. Her words went tumbling over

each other so fast she scarcely heard them herself. While she talked she made a missile by tying in her handkerchief a year-old pawn ticket, a sheaf of bills; how to weight it? Not with her wrist watch. That would break in throwing. But she'd other jewelry along, several favorite pieces—

When young Mrs. Van Horn, dressed for the street, emerged from the cubicle where she had tried on a new gown, she was smiling. Echoes of her own voice in pleading, confusion, humiliation, broke and fled before other echoes across a mahogany screen, echoes of disembodied comfort, sweet as music to young Mrs. Van Horn's credulous ears: "Too late, sister? Not a bit of it." That was the echo that made Mrs. Van Horn smile as she came out of the little dressing room.

She stepped at once into such a stir and bustle of shoppers that fortunately she couldn't distinguish one word of Carrie's greeting to the returned Mabel.

"Fitters all busy, eh? No, I don't mind waiting. By the way, here's a present for you, Mabel. Not that old pawn ticket—I'll keep that. The rest is for you. A windfall come to me; dropped out of the blue sky, you might say. Guess you can use it. Bein' married to Joe can't be all a bed of roses for you, Mabel. I've got no use for the money and doo-dads now, bein' a gold digger like I am!"

Fortunately the flurry of many shoppers muffled those words behind the door young Mrs. Van Horn was passing. She heard only the rough, strong voice pulsing with warmth and wistfulness. Her feet almost danced along the thick, green carpet. She swung her purse. It was a pretty purse, and at this moment it was as light as a heart that has been shriven.



Year of Oblivion

By Winston Bouvé

Author of "Romany's Rest," "The Girl on the Stairs," etc.



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Alison Ordway, young New York society matron, injured in the Japanese earthquake, suddenly recovered her memory several weeks later in a street accident in Havre, where she found herself wearing unfamiliar clothes and carrying an under-arm bag containing the passport of "Mary Sydnor," and a passage to New York on a boat sailing that same morning. It was only on her return home that she discovered that more than a year had elapsed, instead of a few weeks, since she had stood in a Tokyo hotel and seen killed before her eyes a woman who had applied to her for the position of her private secretary, and had herself been driven by the crumbling walls of her apartment out into the panic-filled streets and—oblivion.

On her return, Alison found that Nelson Ordway, her husband, believing her dead, had become engaged to Sheila Ravenen. Her desire for reconciliation with him changed to a proud determination to free him as soon as possible, Alison went to stay with old Miss Bolingbroke, her mother's friend. Together the two women had tried to pry into the secret of that forgotten year and its happenings, but the only thing they succeeded in discovering was four cheap Japanese prints, sewed into the lining of "Mary Sydnor's" under-arm purse.

Then one evening at the opera Alison was accosted by a distinguished-looking Russian who addressed her as "Miss Sydnor." Terrible half memories crowded upon her. Meeting him later at a dance, her fear was confirmed that he was in a position to furnish terrifying facts about her year of oblivion. Dreading to hear more, yet fearing to remain in ignorance, Alison invited Alexis Ilanov to call upon her the following afternoon.

CHAPTER V.

THE return of Alison Ordway had, at least, been of moment to her old friend. Miss Bolingbroke seemed to recruit her failing energies in every direction after the fusion of a young and vital life into the Gramercy Park ménage. The invalid's days were marked by what she loved best—the pulse of youth, quickened by the adventure and intrigue into which Alison found herself propelled.

Alison had come home from the Bachelors' Ball in a fever of excitement that carmined her cheeks and lips, and lent her a sort of desperate abandon that likened her to a haunted bacchante.

As she burst into Miss Marian's room—she had insisted, in her old, authoritative way, that the library on the second floor front be dismantled of its ceiling-high rows of books, its massive, Jacobean furnishings, and be rehabilitated into a room for the invalid, so that she could be wheeled more easily into the long drawing-room that overhung the toy garden, and feel that, in spite of her invalidism, she was in close touch with the household wheels—the old woman looked up from her solitaire delightedly.

"My dear child, why this Cinderella flight from the ball? It's barely twelve."

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"And time for you to be in bed!" amended Miss Nevis, whose implacable tyranny had been defeated of late weeks by her willful patient.

The rebel shook her frail, beautifully dressed head.

"Before I've had my milk punch? You're neglecting me outrageously, Nevis!"

Alison, knowing perfectly that the faithful Miss Nevis had been urging the ordered nourishment upon her charge for hours, returned her harried look with a smile of amusement, and watched her protesting back disappear.

"What has happened?" Miss Bolingbroke settled herself among her pillows with a childlike air of expectancy, and laid down the cards she held. "Alison, you've been kissed. Now, don't look ingenuous; you've quite obviously been kissed! By whom? You dashed home to tell me, you know."

Alison moved to the chiffonier, upon which lay Miss Nevis' unpretentious, necessary toilet things, and stared at her vivid reflection.

"Was Nelson there, or his inamorata?"

"No!" Mrs. Ordway's clipped negative hinted at the explosive. "Really, Tante, Sheila has the good taste not to run into me in public. Give her credit for that!"

Miss Bolingbroke made a charming *moue* at her inadequate display of hearts, tapped a black king with a contemplative, wizened forefinger.

"Poor dear, I dare say she's having a dull time during her enforced seclusion. Well, she can't have everything! You needn't have caught me up so sharply; I didn't think for an instant that Nelson had kissed you."

Alison posed against the crimson wall.

"You're hopeless. And I'm—kissed! Tante, the thing I've been dreading has happened. We stopped off at the Metropolitan to hear the second act of

'La Tosca,' from Laura Lennihan's box. Just before the lights went down while I was looking over the parterre I saw a man watching me intently. His eyes drew me; they're tremendously magnetic. And when I looked at him again he rose, bowed, with the most unprepossessing smile. His mouth is bad—thin, rather cruel, I think, and yet sensual." She shivered at the memory of it. "I had the craziest desire to run away. At the end of the act I did, bearing poor Rick in my wake, and encountered in the corridor the man, and he seemed to know me. He addressed me, Tante, civilly enough, as Miss Sydnor. His tone and manner hinted at—oh, I don't know what. Foolishly, I tried to cut him, and Rick took me off. An hour later, at the Plaza, he turned up again. And this time I couldn't escape, for some one brought him up and introduced him—to Mrs. Ordway! His name is Alexis Ilanov, Tante. It means nothing to me—nothing but a sense of fear, as if all my life I'd been trying to escape him, and never could, quite."

Her lovely voice broke. She pushed back the tawny masses of her filleted hair with a bewildered, pathetic little gesture.

"But the kiss?" said Miss Bolingbroke.

"I'm coming to that; it happened—almost at once. I let him take me away from the crowd, because I was afraid I might give myself away. Or because I was afraid of what he might tell me," she said wearily.

"What did he tell you?"

"Nothing! He only referred to places—to people—to some urgent, secret matter whose meaning I can't guess! And then, as if he had the right, he took me in his arms, kissed me again and again."

She thrust her small, clenched fist against her parted lips, as if to strike away the ghost of that fervid caress.

"What did you do?" demanded Miss Marian with some excitement.

"Do? What one usually does under such circumstances—nothing. I was spared anything further by the advent of my partner. And then, Tante, because I was afraid not to, because I can't stand the latent, dreadful potentiality of that year, I committed myself irrevocably to him. I let him know that I was afraid by asking him to come here!"

"You wouldn't have been human if you hadn't," the old woman acceded. "Does he know that the year is a blank to you?"

Alison pressed her slim, jeweled hands to her hot cheeks, staring intently at the opposite wall.

"I think not. He seems to think—or pretend—that I've simply chosen to obliterate whatever passed between us. Tante, in spite of that kiss, that man is my enemy!"

Miss Bolingbroke scanned her cards absorbedly, and began to build, down.

"Then he has chosen a worthy adversary; you're quite capable of holding your own, I should say, my dear. Now why did I cover up that knave of clubs!"

"Not blindfolded!" Alison murmured. "Tante, what have I done?"

"Nothing of any importance, I dare say. But after a night's sleep you'll decide, if I'm not mistaken, that the encounter was most fortunate. For through this amorous gentleman you can trace your year."

"I'm not sure now that I want to!"

Miss Bolingbroke sighed dolorously as Nevis approached with her punch.

"If you've sweetened it too much, I won't drink it, that's flat! Alison, if you fail to unearth the whole thing, I'll never forgive you. Let me tell you one thing, my naïve child. When you are playing at cross-purposes with some one use his battery of munition as though it were your own, and never let

him see what your reserve amounts to! Now, go to bed. Your Alexis Ilanov is very apt to call to-morrow."

The next day Alison spent in a confused turmoil of necessary proceedings. In the morning before she had finished her chocolate and rolls, brought her by the pretty Belgian maid she had engaged the previous week, Nelson's lawyer telephoned her for an appointment, and she spent hours—unhappy, painful hours—in his Wall Street office, blindly accepting his tedious explanations, his sheets of figures. It was like Nelson, she thought bitterly, to insist upon putting before her a detailed accounting of every penny of hers which had been spent! She told herself that she was relieved at his absence from the musty office, but it was rather a sense of abeyance, of a longed-for moment deferred, that swept over her when she saw he was not there.

Of course, her predicament would mean less than nothing to him, now. Tears of frustration and self-pity, which she understood, characteristically, and hated herself for permitting, rose to her lovely eyes as she pretended to read the unintelligible rows of figures. That he should take for granted that all she cared about was the rearrangement of her monetary affairs! She would not admit even to herself that what she really wanted—and needed—was Nelson's supporting presence, his warm, encouraging sympathy, and the psychic self-confidence that his advocacy would restore. She wanted desperately to link her arms about his neck, lay her bright head upon his steadfast shoulder, and tell him her fears.

But she put the thought from her. All he knew of her experience was what the world at large knew—what, at wise Miss Bolingbroke's suggestion, she had given out to the press, which had besieged her for days; to her fascinated, curious friends. Only she and Miss

Marian knew that she had spent her mysterious year as Mary Sydnor—only she, and Miss Marian, and the Russian, Ilanov! It had seemed wisest to let the world believe that, a victim of aphasia, she had been befriended by some kindly English people, and had stayed with them in seclusion until her memory was restored.

Fortunately, she was not allowed much time to herself in these early days of her rehabilitation as one of the most popular members of her gay set. Her world claimed her, and that same day a luncheon party given in her honor swept her from the dim weirs of doubt, the gray presage of disaster, to the pseudo security of her established life, her position.

The luncheon passed off pleasantly enough. The very quality of her experience kept her friends from dwelling upon it. She was grateful for the respite. How grateful, no one guessed.

That luncheon marked a memorable incident, though she did not know it at the time.

Mrs. Nat Spaulding, the charming, plain wife of a man whose diplomatic career had been cut short by his dissipations, but who still retained a variety of his old connections in various legations, slipped her arm through Alison's as they were leaving the balcony of Sherry's.

"Are you engaged to-morrow night? I've a dinner on which might amuse you. And I'll place you next to a really charming person, whom you may have met in Japan—Count Sensei Ymachi. He belongs to the samurai, and he's here on some semi-diplomatic business, I gather."

Mrs. Ordway caught her breath.

"I know him. How sweet of you to ask me, Nan! I'd like to renew our acquaintance. He entertained me delightfully while I was in Japan."

As she walked down the Avenue the chilly dusk, lit with myriad points of

light, stirred her almost joyously. The poignant beauty of the hour was blurred by a fine mist, into which the stone heights of the crested buildings merged, ghostlike. The dim blue of cathedral arches spanned the vertical hives, honeycombed with gold. The broad vista had the effect of a beautifully managed stage set, seen through almost imperceptible gauze.

At twenty-eight one is incapable of unremitting martyrdom. The vigils of care are never indefinitely prolonged, for sensory illusions are so easily wrought by externals.

Alison Ordway felt her spirits soar in mercurial flight. The autumn wind, hinting at frost, whipped color into her cheeks, courage into her veins. She breasted it in a sudden exhilaration. The very thought of meeting the courtly little Japanese gentleman, at whose house she had been entertained royally during her first stay in the toy kingdom in the spring preceding the catastrophe, buoyed her up. For through him, whom she liked and trusted and knew to be a power in his own land, she might learn the sequel to her Tokyo mishap.

He could trace her unknown career, perhaps, from the time she fell across the lintel of the abandoned house, struck by a falling beam, until she left Japan. Then she would have, at least, a groundwork to build upon.

She was still fraught with hope when she ran up the steps of the Gramercy Park house and rang. The maid admitted her with a sigh of relief.

"There's a gentleman waiting to see you, Miss Alison."

Nelson? That would be a fitting end to the happy hour. But Delia knew him well. A shadow fell athwart the polished boards, and her temperamental, unfounded sense of joy was at an end. Alexis Ilanov bowed, one long hand touching his too perfectly tailored morning coat, just beneath the waxen gardenia in its lapel.

"It was good of you to permit me this pleasure."

The man's voice was positively silky. As she ordered tea and gestured him into a chair on the other side of the pie-crust table she found herself yielding once more to the instinctive, mingled dread and hatred which he had inspired in her the night before, even prior to his kiss.

"Sugar? Cream or lemon? But, of course, you take your tea in true Russian fashion, very strong, without either adjunct!"

He took the Sèvres cup, managing to touch her fingers as he did so; smiled at her indulgently.

"So you remember that, Maruska."

She was about to murmur some ironic reference to the obvious, but refrained.

"This is as you like it?"

"Perfect. I could fancy myself back at eleven, Rue Lausanne!"

She let her long sweep of lash hide the sudden, haggard desperation in her eyes. Tante was right. Her reserve of munition must be guarded from the enemy's cognizance. If she could but extract from Ilanov what she wanted to know, and keep him uncertain—for he was uncertain. He was eying her with a frankly baffled air.

"Last night, Maruska, I was at a loss to understand your attitude. But to-day it is not so difficult. I have learned much; it is conceivable now why Mrs. Nelson Ordway chose to forget our friendship, to be ignorant of the reason for my following her here. Are we alone *chérie*?"

She flung him an indifferent look.

"Hardly that. The doors are open—to stay open, if you please, monsieur—and servants are passing through the lower halls continuously."

His prominent, very white teeth gleamed in a bland smile.

"Then you do not mind my being quite frank, in spite of the lack of privacy? *Bien*!"

She rose, with dragging footsteps crossed the parquet to the folding doors, and drew them shut.

He was as lithe as an underfed cat, as quick on his patent-leather-shod feet. Before she had taken three steps he was at her side, imprisoning her wrists in a talonlike grasp. The power in his slender, olive fingers was amazing.

"Maruska, I am still in the dark about many things. I do not know why you should have done a certain thing, but I do know that you did it, and achieved the doing with a cleverness that not even I, Ilanov, could compete with. But I have been patient long enough. Both the council and I are weary of waiting for you to—remember."

She could only stare at him, striving to make comprehensible his swift, all but meaningless words.

"You shall not look at me so!" he said softly. "You are no longer the woman you were. I watched you, remember! You are alive, alert, no more a speechless statue of a woman. Either that, or you are less cunning than you were. I confess, I do not know! Maruska, do you not know that you cannot escape me? Have you not tried before?"

She could not play any rôle against that beating torrent of words. Afraid, blindly groping for the key to his utterances, she turned to sheer truth.

She held out her hands despairingly.

"Alexis Ilanov, I am not the woman you seek. I am not Mary Sydnor!"

He laughed.

"You are too clever to profess the belief that I, Ilanov, was ever fooled as to that?" he deprecated. "Do you think, while you lay in that mission hospital outside of Tokyo, that I was idle? No. But Barheit came on when I sent him word that you had not the documents—Barheit, who had chosen you for the mission! You are a mag-

nificent fool, but you were not brazen enough to meet him face to face!"

He laughed in gentle, sinister recollection.

"And then, almost within reach of the Bear's death-dealing paws, you continue to assert that you have not what we want. Magnificent, mad Maruska!"

She sat statue still, imprinting every word upon her memory, that she might puzzle over each one until the whole meant something to her. What were these documents of which he spoke?

"I have no papers!"

The words fell from her distracted lips almost automatically, and she knew dimly that she had uttered the denial before.

"Ilanov, look at me! I am not the same woman whom you knew in the Rue Lausanne."

In panic, she told herself that she must make him understand, and make him render intelligible these half-sheathed threats and accusations. He looked down at her, and his face, foreshortened, firelit—the flickering play of firelight can transfigure the human countenance strangely, with its patterns of black and red—seemed incomparably sinister to her. His long, pale features writhed in a smile, or seemed to, as the changing fantasy of flame leaped up in the consummation of a fresh log. The outline of his narrow head gave her a distinct shock. It was a fanciful notion, but the way his dark hair grew up from his rather intellectual forehead suggested what the tufts over each ear might hide. Alison, looking away, found herself staring at the grotesque shadow his profile cast upon the opposite wall. It needed no play of imagination to endow that monstrous head with horns.

"When I saw you last night I knew that," he admitted. "You have found yourself, Maruska. Perhaps you have been dazed, forgetful, since your unhappy experience. But now—now you

are mistress of every faculty. You can put us off no longer with gestures, and dextrous denials. Maruska, not even your beauty can avail you now. The Bear is growing very restive, and when he strikes—"

Alison Ordway felt as if evil itself were closing in upon her. She strove to retain her sane judgment, her balance. This was too unreal! She sprang up to vanquish the fitful, uncertain light of the fire with the steady glow of lamplight.

"Not even I, who love you more than life, can aid you then. I love you more than life, Maruska, but not more than one other thing!" Significantly he waited. "Do not pit yourself against me. It would be too futile. For, my wild bird, I could crush you, so."

His thin, powerful hands closed upon her wrists, small boned and delicate, and she wondered in the agony of the moment that the bones did not snap.

"No more evasions, Maruska! You know that you sent the awaited word. You had the papers for which two nations would spill the blood of many men, the gold of centuries. How you got them we never knew. What became of them? Tell me, Maruska!"

Faint and weak with that steely pressure, Alison managed to shake her head. She had the strange, dim sensation of having gone through such a scene a thousand times before.

"I can't tell you. I do not know!"

There was no warmth of desire in his cold eyes now, but an inexorable and merciless intention.

"I have no such papers. I know nothing about them!"

Alison Ordway could never have been forced by rack or licking flames to abjure her creed. Physical domination, the stress of pain, only served to strengthen her indomitable resolve. Had she lived in the days of early Rome, she would have awaited her turn in the arena wordless; a few centuries

later she would have stood stanch at the stake. Now, she was quite capable of enduring the wrenching agony of his cruel hands until he should desist.

"You have them, or you know where they are hidden. Under my very eyes, Maruska, you brought them out of Japan!"

She merely clenched her teeth, eyed him with arrogant, defiant denial. And it was he who gave way; he thrust her from him, breathless and pale.

"You are strong and brave, Maruska—a very eaglet. But you are pinioned now. I tell you, I fear for my own safety. The Bear is mistrustful of me. I must have those documents if I have to destroy the thing that is dearest in the world to me in order to procure them!"

"That would not serve you," said Alison from the fullness of the fatalistic calm that had overwhelmed her. She rubbed her wrists, and wondered if the marks of his hands would show upon them.

"Are you dreaming of a greater price?" the man asked softly.

"Of nothing. I can only tell you, I have not got those papers! Ilanov, I brought nothing with me out of Japan. Nothing"—she laughed ironically—"except a handful of cheap Japanese prints!"

A footfall sounded creakingly on the stair.

"Now go." Strange that she could still command. Yet was it so strange? For, in a curious fashion, she held the whip hand. Whatever the mysterious documents, of which he spoke, were, they meant everything to him. And as long as he fancied that she could lead him to them— She must remember! Was it possible that she had done some dishonorable, some treacherous thing? If the veil would only lift!

"Go!"

Miss Bolingbroke's physician was even now in the hall. Ilanov bowed.

"I go. But remember, Maruska, I shall never be far from you!"

He smiled, and pushed back the folding doors. Doctor Falmouth greeted Mrs. Ordway and her unusual, foreign friend with the velvety manner of the fashionable specialist. She kept him after a brusque dismissal of the Slav.

"How is your patient, Doctor Falmouth?"

He looked portentous.

"I scarcely know what to say. She is better, Mrs. Ordway, in a sense, and infinitely happier. But the stage of her disease precludes the possibility of any real improvement. Yet Miss Nevis tells me that she is eating better, sleeping better, in much better shape nervously. I'm delighted. It is your being here that has achieved the miracle."

"I'm so glad." Alison caught her fresh underlip between her teeth. "Doctor Falmouth, you are a nerve specialist, aren't you? Could you tell me—offhand—what the prospect of recovering the memory of that lost year of mine is? Shall I ever—know what happened?"

She waited tensely for his answer. It did not come for some seconds, for he was noting her strained look, her nerve tension.

"I couldn't possibly tell you offhand. Why don't you drop in to see me in the morning? You're nervous, pretty badly wrought up. I can tell better when I know more about the cause. At ten thirty, then."

She could not face an evening's gayety. So, instead, she sat playing double Canfield with Miss Marian, who, upon hearing all that had passed between Alison and the Russian, drummed upon the board with her tiny hands, lost in thought.

"It's rather a morass, isn't it? It's more, now, than the mere satisfying of your curiosity, Alison. If we only knew why that persistent devil was so sure that the mysterious papers were in your

possession! Could you have discovered them—made some use of them during that year?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

Alison clasped her lovely temples.

"Tante, a week ago I was sure that, whatever the year might have held, it could not disclose anything dreadfully to my discredit. After all, I'm a gentlewoman; I'm a fairly decent person; I've always retained rather antedated notions of the proprieties; and I loathe subterfuge, petty treachery, anything dishonorable. Could I, who have kept faith with most of the things I was taught, have sunk to the sort of thing this Ilanov implies? It can't be true—it can't!"

"Eleven, Rue Lausanne," Miss Marian ruminated. "Could you trace Mary Sydnor back there? No, it's too risky, striking out in the dark! Until we learn more of that complex lady we had better not associate you with her. Alison, have you examined thoroughly those bags you brought back with you?"

She knew they both had. Obviously, if she had left the portentous papers behind her in her flight, her pursuer would have uncovered them. Had she destroyed them, she wondered? If so, had the act been for good or evil? She groaned despairingly.

"I am to see Doctor Falmouth in the morning. I'd give twenty years of my life for that one, Tante, gladly! If he could restore the memory of that year to me——"

She almost murmured that she would ask nothing else. But the thought of Nelson silenced the rash words on her lips. She didn't want him to marry Sheila, she told herself, for he was sensitive, easily hurt. And Sheila, under her clinging, yielding softness, was hard—hard.

"Falmouth is a fraud," observed the patient who was easily his chief source of income. "But he's so extremely

agreeable that one pins one's faith to him endlessly. He will only look important and suggest that a change of scene might compose your nerves and tone you up generally, and that a great shock might or might not restore your memory."

As it turned out, that was precisely what the learned medico had to say at the end of the interview on the following morning. And Alison, unable to accept his encouraging, indefinite verdict with any degree of cheer, left his office despairingly.

She was in a blind maze, each labyrinthine path of which led up to an ultimate impasse. A sleepless night had left violet rings under her eyes, pallor upon her oval cheeks, which were beginning to show the faintest of hollows. The endless, fruitless turmoil of her thoughts left her physically fatigued. Her nerves, Falmouth had told her, were in bad shape. She realized it as, walking east on Fifty-ninth Street, she found herself glancing behind her from time to time.

She could not escape the fanciful obsession that a certain shabby taxicab, which lumbered slowly through the crosstown traffic, had stood at the curb, several houses down the block, opposite the doctor's office. There were quantities of ramshackle cabs on the streets of the city, but this one was more or less distinguished by a blue flag.

She walked on swiftly, her pulses pounding with excitement. Was it only her tricky fancy, or was she actually under surveillance? After her interview with Alexis Ilanov the day before she could believe him capable of anything, much more than merely keeping her under his pale, unpleasant eyes.

She decided to set her mind at rest on that particular score; she looked about her. The block was lined with bookstores, with small, obscure shops of various sorts. Suddenly she remembered that she was still carrying with

her the rather pretty prints Miss Bolingbroke had discovered tucked away under the new lining of her under-arm purse. She had been intending to have them matted and framed, for they had charm, if they lacked value.

Before her was a small establishment where calendars and greeting cards and prints of popular masterpieces were to be obtained. The gold lettering on the plate glass announced that mounting and framing was done, at reasonable prices, within.

She stepped into the shop.

The boy who waited upon her was not at all impressed with the delicate water scenes. Possibly he felt the lack of any Mount Fuji in the vistas of mountainless harbor views. But the faint blue-and-gray coloring was lovely.

"I'd like these mounted and framed, please. Let me see those narrow moldings."

Alison spread out the thin sheets, and hoped that the creases could be obliterated.

"You want that writing cut off, don't you? It makes them look lopsided, running down the side, the way it does."

Alison tilted her head, and considered the queer characters in red ink which sprawled down the left-hand border of each print.

"I think not. It makes them rather quaint. No, leave them just as they are, and mount them on an inch border of black. This lacquer red is pretty. You have it in half-inch molding?"

It took perhaps ten minutes to decide on the width of the frame, and then upon the plainest red lacquer that the shop boasted. But she left the place with the pleasant sense of satisfaction every woman achieves when she has found a bit of brocade for a cushion top which brings out the loveliest tints in her rugs, or when she comes upon the one perfect paper for the east room. The decorative instinct is a ruling pas-

sion in the feminine heart, and Alison was no exception to the rule. Those unimportant prints would have an admirable air in their new guise!

She paused on the threshold of the shop, glanced up and down the thoroughfare. She had been right. The mud-splashed machine was standing at the corner, on clumsy guard!

Was Ilanov crouched within its dark interior, waiting for her to leave the shop? A wave of tremendous excitement passed over her inexplicably. She stood staring at the machine, striving to pierce the dimness of the car's window. It seemed to her suddenly that there should be a face pressed palely against the glass. It seemed imperative that this should happen. And then the sensation passed.

She laughed under her breath. These curious impulses, these moments of expectancy, based on nothing in her conscious mind, were maddening, baffling beyond belief. It was as if everything, her very heartbeats, had paused, until some ordained eventuality should come to pass. And that ever-impending moment never came.

She was approaching hysteria, she thought numbly as she hurried down Park Avenue. She must calm herself, control these mental fluctuations. If she permitted herself to dwell upon all the possibilities laid open to her, she would go insane. Or something would snap in her brain, and there would be nothing but darkness.

Only one hope extended itself to her now. There was still the possibility that Count Ymachi might be of aid in tracing her departure from Japan, at least. She feverishly counted the hours until she should be seated next to him at Nan Spaulding's table.

The moment presented itself at last. She and Ymachi had greeted each other, recalled several charming, shared episodes, and he had taken her in to dinner. The man at her left was de-

voting himself to the magnificent ruin of a famous beauty. The long table was alive with the incessant talk that betokens the successful dinner. She laid her hand on the arm of the small Oriental, and looked anxiously into his bland, pleasant face, which resembled a ruddy harvest moon.

"Count Ymachi, you know, of course, that I was in Tokyo at the time of the earthquake. I was hurt, and for a year my mind was a blank. Is it possible for me to trace my forgotten steps from that day? It—it is of the most urgent importance that I learn how long I remained in Japan; how and with whom I left."

He blinked rather sadly.

"Dear madame, I am sorrowful to tell you that my country is still in a chaos indescribable from her calamity. I very much fear that it would be more than impossible to discover what you wish to know."

He sighed.

"There are many people, many things to be traced, unhappily. My poor country is impoverished, demoralized, imperiled." He stopped abruptly, conscious of the note his seriousness struck in the surrounding gayety, and went on more lightly: "We islanders, madame, are the nations who realize most the desperate need of defense. For we are exposed to our enemies, and cut off from the succor of our allies."

She scarcely heard him as he talked on, fervent with his enthusiasms, his belief in the new Japan.

"And, in spite of all our suffering—for in that tragedy the rich lost more than the poor—one thing, one very great thing, was accomplished: an unbreakable, an eternal bond of gratitude was established between my country and yours, madame. We of the East do not forget kindnesses. So for that I am grateful, and glad to have endured those evil days. All my life I have hoped to see a lasting friendship established. I,

and a great many others, have welcomed the potentiality, even at the expense of our private fortunes."

"You were reduced by the earthquake?" asked Alison regretfully, remembering his palatial home.

"I was ruined," he told her simply. "But each separate disaster seems very small in the face of a nation's prostration."

She was sick with disappointment. But she could only relinquish that lost hope, and admire the man's fortitude.

CHAPTER VI.

It was several days before Alison admitted to herself that she was under constant and adequate surveillance. And then, when she came upon Ilanov suddenly in an empty room in a picture gallery she ceased to tell herself that she needed change of air and scene. He had not been to see her since that memorable afternoon, but at sight of him she knew that his system had been as nearly perfect as possible. She was with Nan Spaulding; she felt faintness steal over her as he approached, and she was forced to make the introduction.

"The wicked, fascinating creature!" murmured Nan behind her muff. "Alison, is he one of the reasons for your mysterious year abroad?"

The jest she ignored. But, to her embarrassment, his manner was so discreetly intimate that Nan strolled off toward the sculpture gallery, leaving them momentarily alone.

"Maruska, you are more beautiful each time I see you! Do you know what torture it has been to me to have been so close to you that I could have put out my hand and touched you a dozen times this past week, and to have restrained myself?"

"How dare you spy upon me?" she flamed in an undertone. "Ilanov, if your persecution continues——" She stopped short.

"You will have me apprehended? Yes? I think not, for you are a clever, a level-headed woman, Maruska. You would not commit such an unpardonable folly!" There was no one near by. His hand touched her, and she shuddered at the caress. The man was capable of the most incredible contradictions. He was her enemy, and he let her know it, and yet the first opportunity that offered itself invariably led him to his tempestuous love-making.

His words appalled her with their truth. She dared not share the burden of her secret with any one in the world save Miss Bolingbroke.

"Maruska, I spoke to you only to remind you that time is in flight. I am besieged by impatient inquiries—demands. Only I, remember, have stood between you and death before."

Nan Spaulding approached with an indulgent smile.

"You will be alone to-night, at nine o'clock!" he ordered sharply.

"There are some exquisite bronzes in the next room," Nan remarked. "You and Mr. Ilanov should see them before we go."

He was ready to snatch at the opportunity.

"Mr. Ilanov, unfortunately, is hurrying to keep an appointment," said Alison sweetly. "So nice to have run into you."

She held out her suede-gloved hand, grateful for the small victory. But fate, and Nan Spaulding, were perverse.

"Then you must bring him to my next at home," she insisted. "A compatriot of yours—Maranoff—is going to play for me Sunday evening. Tell me, where did Alison meet you?"

Mrs. Spaulding went in for mixed gatherings. Her musicals were a pot-pourri of all nations, and a great many arts, distinguished by a judicious number of her intimates. And whenever she met an agreeable foreigner who was

sponsored in any way she deluged him with attentions until he began to bore her. Alison felt herself flush beneath Ilanov's cold, amused eyes.

"I had the great good fortune to be of slight service to her in Japan."

"Oh! What a centrifugal force Nippon seems to be!" Nan was amused by the unwitting good aim of her earlier jibe. "Then possibly you know another old friend of Alison's, who is here in town now—Count Sensei Ymachi?"

The quality of the encounter had changed. Ilanov's smiling face had resolved itself into a mask, and Alison, quick to sense the impending, knew that in some way the mention of the erstwhile statesman's name had done this. Why? And why was Ilanov smiling at her venomously, a threat in his heavy-lidded eyes.

"I know of him."

She made some excuse or other and fled. Nan Spaulding, she knew, was quite capable of retaining the recalcitrant Russian as long as she chose. And she had openly showed her aversion to any tête-à-tête.

She felt helpless, netted in by the invincible meshes of a snare, the toils of which were already tightening about her slender throat. She turned the first corner she came to, raced down a side street, not thinking or caring where her frantic footsteps led her. Halfway down the shabby, familiar block she heard her name spoken, turned, tense with an unknown dread, to see Ymachi himself leaving an elaborately remodeled brownstone front. Relief surged over her. She waited for him to join her, and noticed idly that in one beautifully draped lower window hung a single panel from a remarkably beautiful Oriental screen. She recognized the new quarters of a famous curio dealer, who handled almost exclusively triumphs of Eastern art.

"Are you reconciling yourself to the horrors of a New York apartment by

transplanting as much of your own beauty to it as possible?" she asked. "That screen, for instance, would make almost any room endurable!"

He smiled at her admiration.

"Unfortunately, madame, I am obliged to dispose of the few things of value remaining to me. I am fortunate in securing Monsieur Vincent as my agent, however. He will place my poor possessions in the most advantageous manner. That screen which you admire he has just purchased outright."

She could have flayed herself for the thoughtless speech. But the little man was simplicity itself.

"May I stroll along with you? It has been my intention, madame, to ask Mrs. Spaulding to bring you to my very humble flat. I have a collection of very fine prints which I should like to show you before they, too, are sold. I remember your telling me that you admired my country's art."

"I do," she told him sincerely. "And I'd love to come. I'm not a connoisseur in any sense of the word, but I've a passion for prints and porcelain. In turn, Count Sensei, I'm going to ask your opinion of four prints I acquired—I must have acquired"—she paused uncertainly—"while I was in Japan. I doubt if they are worth much, but your civilization is incapable of reproducing anything unlovely, even in its cheapest form."

"I should be charmed." He inclined his sleek little head. "Are you simply walking, in your magnificent American fashion, or are you directing your steps toward some destination?"

"No! I suppose my object was the Park. Will you join me? Or, better yet, won't you come home with me? My hostess, with whom I'm spending the winter, is an invalid, but she adores company, and she'll be enchanted if I bring you in for tea."

She could not rid herself of the in-

stinctive feeling that through Ymachi lay her only hope of unearthing her lost or latent self. Perhaps the thought transferred itself to his quick brain.

"I should be very pleased indeed. Madame, in spite of my belief that it will be impossible to find any record of your presence in Tokyo after the quake, I shall notify my secretary there to do everything possible to aid you."

She was trying to determine whether or not to tell him that Mary Sydnor was the name he must trace when her attention was distracted by the sight of a familiar, traffic-jammed corner. Better make any explanations in the privacy of Miss Marian's drawing-room.

"That's very good of you," she told him. "By the way, those prints I spoke of are being framed at a tiny shop around the corner. Shall we stop in on the chance that they're ready?"

He assented, and they crossed the crowded thoroughfare. They stood in front of the shop window, filled with cheap mirrors, reprints of popular masterpieces, dreadful bits of artisanship on the order of "Their First Breakfast," and she looked at the Japanese forlornly.

"This is a shining example of our popular atrocities."

He did not laugh. She followed his bright black gaze, and started at sight of her own prints, quite lovely in their lacquer frames.

"Why, they've put them on display!" she said amusedly. "They really look very well, don't they?"

Sensei Ymachi clasped his small hands, which were, somehow, grotesque in yellow chamois, on the head of his ivory-topped cane. The gesture was utterly Oriental in its impassive acceptance. His harvest moon of a face was wiped of all expression. Alison was amazed.

"Those prints are yours?" he asked at last very gently.

"Yes. You don't mean—that they're valuable?"

She was pleasantly excited, anticipating his reply.

"Valuable!" He laughed without any movement of his facial muscles. "Yes, madame, you are right. These prints of yours are—almost invaluable! Did you not know that?"

She shook her head, nestling her chin in the silver-tipped softness of her fox fur.

"How should I? You see, I acquired them—I suppose I acquired them—after I was hurt."

He was watching her intently, his childlike mouth parted a little. He sighed, nodded.

"Then you were—very fortunate, madame. But let us go in, and take them from that window!"

It was a sacrilege to him, she supposed, to see old and rare prints among that trash. They entered the shop, and she paid the trifling sum and regained her newly distinguished possessions. Gravely Ymachi took the light package from her.

"Permit me, madame."

She laughed in a happy sort of excitement.

"To think of my 'entertaining angels unawares!' " she laughed. "How lucky that I met you to-day! You must translate the cryptic red inscription on them, Count Sensei; is it simply a description of the scenes?"

He hailed a machine; helped her into it.

"Simply—a description," he acknowledged. His round black eyes met hers impersonally. "Madame; will you permit me to make a strange request? Will you sell me those prints? I tell you frankly that they are valuable, and I will gladly accept your valuation of them. But it would give me great happiness to procure them!"

"You have some reason for wanting them?" she wondered.

He bowed. His gloved hands rested lovingly upon the brown-paper package.

"Yes, madame." Once more his eyes searched her clear gaze. "These prints have great value, as I told you. More than that, they have been in my family for a great many centuries." He laughed apologetically, still watching her with that rapt attention.

"I dislike to urge you, madame, and yet——"

She made up her mind suddenly. Ymachi had extended the most charming hospitality to her during her first stay in Nippon. He had been responsible for much of the ensuing pleasure of her trip. If he wanted these prints—they were nothing to her.

"I couldn't put a price on them, Count Sensei, but, if you will accept them with my compliments, as a slight token of my appreciation of your many kindnesses——" She cast her most bewildering smile upon him.

He sat there silent for a long moment, looking like a round-faced, solemn, happy child. At last he stirred, as if he feared to waken from a transient dream of joy.

"I cannot thank you adequately, madame. I can only hope that some day you may understand."

He drew a deep, ecstatic breath, and until they drew up at Miss Bolingbroke's stately door he did not speak again. Alison was frankly puzzled, but she was too much engrossed in her own affairs to be particularly interested in the ardors of the connoisseur. She supposed the prints had some especial, typically Oriental value to the man. After all, ancestral possessions were enshrined in their innermost holies. And then she absorbed herself in the maze of doubt which each encounter with Ilanov rendered more labyrinthine, less decipherable.

Had he escaped Nan's frank enticements, followed her and the Japanese whose name had roused some mysteri-

ous venom within the man? What possible connection could he have with Ilanov, she wondered.

It would be well worth finding out. She would casually mention his name to Ymachi, she decided as she hunted for her key. And as—

The soft, strained accents of the Japanese breathed into her ear.

"It is my fancy, surely, but I have thought that our journey down here was observed by some interested person, and now I see the motor, which was always just behind ours, pass the corner very slowly."

She closed the outer door behind them. What must he think? His bland, round face was expressionless as he permitted the servant to relieve him of his outer vestments. Childlike, he firmly retained his hold upon the precious prints.

"Is Miss Bolingbroke up, Delia?"

She experienced the usual pang of regret and vague uneasiness when the maid informed her that Miss Marian had had a poor day, and was sleeping. The gallant lady never permitted any one in her room unless she was able to rise above the habiliments of illness and pain. For the past two days—they succeeded nights of purgatory, unrelieved by the opiates the doctors dared not give her now, on account of her heart—she had sent loving messages to Alison, and kept her from her.

"I'm so sorry that Miss Marian can't see you this time. Tea in the reception room, Delia, please." She preceded him into the pleasant, formal little room, slipped out of her furred wrap, and removed her hat.

The half hour sped pleasantly by. Then Alison came to her point.

"More tea? Have you been in New York long enough to run across an agreeable, sinister-looking creature named Ilanov, Count Sensei?" she asked idly. "Mrs. Spaulding has met him recently"—that was true enough—

"and I thought you might know him. I can't bear him, personally."

Ymachi sipped his tea with the immeasurable grace of gesture of his race.

"The name is not familiar," he observed blandly.

Alison, a delicious figure in her gray, fur-bordered frock, with an enormous cluster of violets at the waistline, sighed.

"And he was speaking of you only to-day."

Ymachi rose.

"I trust that he spoke of me kindly. Madame, it is getting late. I must leave."

Casually he went to the window, and looked out upon the spangled darkness.

"I have another request to make to you, madame." He turned and smiled at her. "I am not returning at once to my apartment. Will you permit me to leave in your care the prints?"

Astonished at the intensity of his manner, she acceded graciously enough.

"Of course. You will come for them?"

"Later. Or send for them." He busied himself with unwrapping the framed water colors, and laid them lovingly out upon the table. "All four."

"They form a set?" asked Alison.

He smiled.

"A complete set. If one were missing, the other three would not be of the same value. You will guard them carefully, madame?"

She laughed.

"I've never believed in the consuming passion of the collector before, but now—"

It suddenly occurred to her how absurd such a passion was. Ymachi was an impoverished man, forced to offer for sale his most valued possessions. Yet he had willingly, sincerely, offered any price she might ask to regain possession of these nine-by-six panels!

"I am serious"—he looked it—"most serious, madame. Believe me, to an un-

scrupulous person these prints would be greatly desired. They are most valuable."

"There is a wall safe upstairs," she told him. "I will lock them up in it."

He sighed patiently.

"They are far safer with you than with me. For I—I have enemies, madame. I am a blind man, stumbling toward a volcano."

The weariness lifted from his features.

"But the blind man is very happy to-night, thanks to you. I have promised you this: one day you shall know of the service you have rendered. Until an early day—au revoir!"

He bent low over her hand, and the prim maidservant showed him to the door.

Alison looked down at the red-framed water colors; laughed sadly. And then she moved to the window. He was no longer in sight, but from the thick shadows of the shrubbery of the Park another shadow sundered itself, evolved, under the blue glare of the street light, into a muffled male figure. Alison shrank back, drew close the faded damask curtains. If the bell rang—

Delia paused, arrested on her way to the front door.

"I am not at home, Delia."

She knew what would happen; fatalistically waited there until Ilanov should shoulder his way past the expostulatory maid, greet her with his thin-lipped, threatening smile. Shivering, she rubbed her hand, shrinking even now from the lingering touch of his lips, which would stain it so soon.

He was here, in the room with her.

"Barheit is here!" He set aside all personal things for that dramatic announcement. "I saw him, or I would not have known of his presence in New York."

She was silent.

"You know what that means! Mar-

uska, we are both endangered. Oh, you have made a pretty fool of me!" He gnawed furiously at his underlip. "But this is the end. What have you done with the documents?"

Futilely she strove to release herself from his grip. They swayed against the Sheraton table, and the flimsy, framed prints fell to the floor. He pushed them aside with his foot.

"Tell me, before I choke it from you!" His hands slid up her bare arms, fastened about her wildly pulsing throat.

"Alexis"—if she could plead with him—"you hurt me—horribly!" She let her lovely eyes suffuse with tears; swayed against him, irresistible in her utter defenselessness.

His hands fell away.

"You devil! Maruska, once more I tell you what I told you that mad night before you fled from me. You strip a man of honor, of strength, of everything. I look upon your treachery—Ymachi was here, in this room, closeted with you twenty minutes ago; I know it—and see only your mouth of desire, your deep eyes. The touch of your satin skin turns my blood to fire, my resolves to wax! Maruska, I will share your betrayal; save you from the Bear himself, for one word! And then, having sacrificed all, I would make you happy! Happier than this man whose name you bear, who stands aside without question, without complaint, could ever make you. Come to me, beloved!"

She shook her head.

"I hate you!"

"You and I together could conquer the world!" he whispered. "And, instead of that—Maruska, woman of ice and steel—I will live with you at the ends of the earth, but I will not die for you! For the last time, tell me!"

She put her hands upon his shoulders; stared straight into his troubled, pale eyes.

"I do not know. I have not got

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them, Alexis. I swear it! Believe it or not, as you choose!"

He must have read truth in her fearless glance. He drew back, upperlip lifted in an ironic curl.

"I believe you. So you have already disposed of them? That I could not foresee until to-day. So your moon-faced fool has betrayed his trust, too. You are deadly, Maruska! But Ymachi will pay the price of his unwisdom. Yes, he will pay it—to me! And then, my lovely one, it will be your turn!"

His passionless tones inspired her with more dread than his touch, his rash, blustering demands, ever could. Through the hideous, unreal haze two things stood out clearly. This man's hatred of the small, innocuous Japanese, their curious connection, linked by some unknown thing, and, added to her own peril, Ymachi's.

What did it all mean?

"I don't understand," she stammered. "I must be told the truth." She was sobbing softly, desperately. "Alexis Ilanov——"

He laughed.

"You will not catch me off my guard again, Maruska! Until I come again!"

He was gone. And she was afraid—afraid for Sensei Ymachi, who was a simple and honorable gentleman, whatever else he was, and her friend. She picked up the telephone, spoke into it.

CHAPTER VII.

Ymachi himself answered the telephone. His high-pitched yet soft accents—unmistakably Japanese—rose to the inflection of astonishment at her own troubled tones.

"Mrs. Ordway? What has happened?"

Was he expecting something to happen, she wondered swiftly?

"Something that makes it imperative for me to see you at once."

Delia entered the room to remove the

tea things, and the consciousness of another presence muted Alison Ordway. Was it wise to tell him fully over the telephone?

"I am dining out, but I can come to you immediately, madame."

"No! No!" It occurred to her that the alternative would be the wisest course of action. "I cannot speak freely now. May I come to your flat? You are alone?"

He was too much concerned with the gravity of the moment to dwell upon the Occidental barbarism of her suggestion.

"We shall be uninterrupted. I shall expect you, madame."

"But where?" she demanded desperately. "You left only your telephone number, Count Sensei."

Automatically she wrote down the carefully given street and number; stared at it for a long instant before its familiarity roused her to recognition. And then she laughed. Ymachi had subleased an apartment in the building which housed pretty Sheila Ravenen, whom she had not yet seen since her return. Quaint, troubling coincidence! If she should meet her on the dark stairs, in the hall——

What did it matter? It was a slight source of apprehension—no more. She slid her arms into the richly furred gray wrap, and drew its folds about her. There were always taxis to be had at the corner.

"I shall be back within an hour, Delia. Tell Mathilde to put out my blue morocain—no, I'll wear the black velvet that came to-day. With the new silver shoes."

She saw Delia stoop and pick up the framed prints with a slightly scandalized look to her thin shoulders. Poor Delia! What did she think of these happenings? How much, Alison wondered, had she overheard of the scene with Ilanov? It was fortunate indeed that Miss Bolingbroke retained her old-

fashioned staff of servants in the face of more modern problems of entertaining.

She pondered upon this phase of her situation as the machine she hailed threaded its way downtown. Twelfth Street, Tenth—they turned west, and she recognized the familiar route with dismay and dread. She couldn't face Sheila! The possibility of encountering her—and Nelson—assailed her. They doubtless dined together frequently in the small, quaint restaurants of the neighborhood. Perhaps they frequented the old Martin's. It had been an adventure to her, once!

The cab drew up to the curb, and after glancing out, to see that the dark entrance of the building was unoccupied, she stepped out and dismissed the taxi.

She pressed the button beneath Ymachi's beautifully engraved card feverishly, and was rewarded by an answering click. There was no elevator, no attendant in the shabby lower hall. One of Sheila's bitterest complaints was this lack of service, but Alison was grateful that such was the case as she sped up the three long flights, passing Miss Ravenen's closed door with trepidation.

Breathless, flushed, she paused before knocking on Ymachi's shabby panels. And the door was opened from within by Count Sensei's native servant.

"Count Ymachi?" asked Mrs. Ordway. Some instinct restrained her from giving her name. "He is expecting me, I believe."

The small servant bowed, and with exquisite courtesy showed her into the large, shabbily furnished living room.

"He will see you in ver' few moments, madame. He dress now for dinner, and ask that you excuse."

He beamed upon her with the ineffable smile of his race. Without unfastening her wrap, or lifting the chiffon-bordered veil, she seated her-

self; watched the soft-footed little Oriental pad across the narrow hall which divided the old-fashioned flat, and knock upon the door of the room directly opposite the apartment in which she waited. Ymachi's pleasant voice just reached her ear, and the boy announced her presence. He approached her again.

"My master begs that you make yourself mos' comfortable, and that you excuse him few minutes more, with compliments."

He snapped on a lamp at her elbow, gestured to the rack of magazines near by.

"If madame wish no more from me, I go now, yes?"

Alison realized that the only service Ymachi could now afford was the part-time attendance of some university student. She dismissed the boy; glanced about the chilly, unattractive quarters that sheltered the head of one of the oldest and most magnificent Niponese houses; sighed. That the scion of such glory should have come to this!

The student servant bowed himself out; traversed the long corridor that led to the rear of the apartment. Alison, who knew so well its duplicate on a lower floor, conjured up the silk-hung, subtly pretentious rooms of Sheila Ravenen, who hated the shabbiness she so skillfully concealed from her friends. She shut her eyes, and a vision of the rose-and-mulberry living room, warm and rosy and so flattering to its black-haired, white-skinned mistress, persisted. Perhaps, even now, Nelson lay stretched out in the capacious black-and-rose chair before the fireplace, made comfortable by Sheila's soft, deft little hands. The thought was intolerable.

"Fool!" whispered Alison Ordway to herself, and, to while away the minutes that wore on so interminably, she picked up a London review and strove to obliterate her troubling thoughts in

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the clever article at which the magazine fell open.

Faint movements came from time to time from the room across the narrow hall, whose door presented its blank, ivory panels to her view. She hoped Ymachi would not make too much of a toilet.

She was half through the essay when she heard a faint sound that brought her to her feet expectantly. Had he called to her from the other room? She waited for the door to open, for his small, rotund form, immaculate in the most formal of evening attire, to appear before her. But, quite evidently, Count Ymachi was having some difficulty with the final stages of his toilet. Was he dragging out a suitcase or trunk in which to seek the duplicate of a refractory collar button, she wondered amusedly as something heavy was moved with difficulty across the parquet? At the end of five minutes more irritation possessed her. Really, this was presumptuous of the man! Surely he, of all people, understood her most natural hesitation in coming here, to a man's apartment.

She pushed back her chair, rose impatiently, and strolled to the half-filled bookcase at the other end of the room. Her buckled foot beat an impatient tattoo upon the rug. She had not dreamed that the charming Japanese could be guilty of such a discourtesy! She must have been here fully half an hour by now.

A cold draft of air made her pull the enveloping squirrel closer about her bared throat. It seemed to come from behind her. She wheeled about expectantly, and faced the blank panels of the door. Had it been opened, and softly shut again? She told herself that her nerves were playing tricks upon her.

She seated herself once more in the single luxurious chair the room boasted. It was fortunate that the servant had

turned on the lights, for otherwise the room and hall would have been quite dark.

She never knew how many minutes she sat there, waiting, before her eyes were drawn to a curious, dark thread of something that thrust itself from under the closed door separating her from Ymachi. Thread? It was no thread, but something indescribably horrid; something that crawled toward her by almost imperceptible degrees with a slow, an irresistible progress.

She looked again. That disquieting, wormlike movement of that somber veinlet was no figment of the imagination. Only a hurried throb broke the intolerable stillness of the room, and that, Allison realized, was the noisy beat of her heart. Strange that she had not noticed the stillness before! It was so still that one might fancy oneself the sole occupant of the rambling flat—of the building, even! She had to remind herself that Sensei Ymachi was in the next room, separated from her only by that white-paneled door.

Her eyes were inexorably drawn back to the threshold. Her hands, tightly clasped, were cold as marble in their white glacé gloves. That dark, significant line was spreading.

Slowly, unwillingly, she approached; stared down at it, fascinated. Horror gripped her throat muscles, kept her from uttering the name of the man who must be waiting on the other side of the door. She could not speak or call; could only bend down, touch her trembling, gloved fingers to that dark stain. She knew before she held them up that they would be marked with wet crimson. Yet the trickle of a single ruddy drop down the palm of her gloved hand released the stricture of terror that imprisoned her voice.

"Ymachi!" she called frantically. "Open the door!"

But only silence answered her.

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She grasped the door knob. It turned easily, but something soft and heavy obstructed entrance to the sleeping room. She put her slim shoulder to the panel, pushed, and the obstacle gave way.

The plain, bare room was flooded with light from the unshaded incandescents on either side of the chiffonier. No kindly shadow subdued the stark ugliness of what it held. The window, opening upon a fire escape, a court, stood open, so that the muslin curtains billowed like great white birds in the cold air. The glare of light, the open window, gave a curious lack of privacy to what should have been hidden.

Sensei Ymachi lay on the floor, grotesquely doll-like in his immaculate magpie black and white. Alison's shuddering gaze traveled slowly from the still, patent-leather-shod feet, almost feminine in the neat turn of the silk-clad ankles beneath the trouser cuff, up the lifeless body that looked singularly small and shrunken in the strained attitude in which he had fallen, or been struck down. The round black eyes were wide open, and full of a dreadful astonishment. Perhaps that moment of amazement, sometimes left imprinted upon the staring vision of the dead, is the most fearsonic thing for man to look upon.

Alison Ordway sank to her knees beside the huddled form, touched the out-flung wrist. It was already cold. And the slippery, spreading pool in which he lay was still slowly widening its margins.

She clapped her hand to her pale mouth to stifle a cry of sheer horror when she realized that this thing had happened while she had lingered impatiently in the room across the hall. But why had there been no outcry? How could it have happened? A knife thrust, perfectly timed, in the back had taken Ymachi's life swiftly, effectively. That hideous wound through the lungs

might easily have stifled the man's outcry, if he had made any. And Alison fancied that Sensei Ymachi had gone to his fathers silently, without utterance of fear or complaint. A sudden memory overwhelmed her—the memory of a half-heard exclamation, of something heavy falling, or being dragged.

She drew a long, sobbing breath. So she had sat there waiting while the assassin crept up the iron rungs of the fire escape, swung himself in through the open window, struck. She had heard the gasp of amazement, the soft thud of Ymachi's body. And she had sighed impatiently!

Now, she stood here beside the murdered man, glancing about her like a trapped animal. She was alone in the flat. Alone. An almost unconquerable impulse toward flight possessed her. She must get away before any one should come; find her here.

"Don't lose your head!" she whispered to herself, dry lipped. "That would be a mad thing to do! Too many people know you have been here."

She must leave that bare, garish room of death. She closed the door behind her and sped down the long corridor which led to the dining room and kitchen and servant's room.

There was no one there. The servant who had admitted her had long since gone. She scarcely knew whether she was relieved or not by the discovery. She knew that she must return to the living room and telephone the authorities. That was the only sane, the only decent thing to do. And yet—she cast a longing glance toward the door that led to the rear hall of the building. To descend those little-used flights, slip out through the tradesmen's entrance, was to avoid the distasteful, even dangerous inquiry which would immediately arise upon the linking of her name with Ymachi's.

But this she must not do. She turned blindly and retraced her steps. Behind

that blank door a gentle, kindly little man who had been her friend lay in the indignity of sudden, dreadful death. Death by the hand of—an enemy!

Her own hands, that were pressed to her cheeks in her dismay, dropped. She was remembering the threatening words of her enemy—and Ymachi's. With that memory as poignant as it was, dared she lift the receiver and notify the police?

She swayed toward the library table, where the telephone stood. As she reached for it, the downstairs bell shrilled in the corridor.

Dazed, half sick with terror, she waited, leaning against the wall, while the leisurely footsteps mounted the last flight. Who was it? Some friend of Ymachi's? Or—

An unseen hand rapped on the panels as she had done. She stood as if paralyzed; the door opened slowly. Apparently it had been left unlatched by the departing servant. The hall was unlighted as yet. Miss Ravenen had cause for complaint as to the service of the building. A tall, dark figure loomed ominously before her:

"Something terrible has happened," she heard herself say, and the words seemed to come from an indefinite distance. Her knees were giving way under her. Her eyelids seemed weighed down with lead. Only a strong, supple arm kept her from falling, but at its touch the rushing waters which had threatened to overwhelm her, receded.

Alexis Ilanov stood before her.

"You here, Maruska? You are as pale as the moonflower. Why?"

"Ymachi—is in there—dead!" she told him huskily.

His colorless eyes widened at sight of the sluggish trickle still issuing from beneath the door of the bedroom. His hands tightened upon her.

"And what do you know of it?" he demanded. "Maruska, when did you come here?"

"I only know—that he's lying there—in his own blood. Ilanov—" Her voice rose to the pitch of despair, and he clapped his hand over her mouth.

"Ilanov, you don't think it was I who killed him?"

He looked at her long, as if it were difficult for him to make up his mind.

"You are here alone. Take me to him."

As she had done, he knelt beside the murdered man, careful to touch nothing. He was very pale when he rose.

"Don't handle the door knob. Let us go into the next room."

Desperately she was explaining to him her part in the dreadful hour.

"You felt a draft, but the door was closed when you turned. You heard nothing, saw no one?"

"Nothing—no one." She pushed back her hair. "I was about to telephone for the police when you came."

"Madness," he told her crisply. "You are a fool at times, Maruska." He took her unwilling hands. "Why were you here?"

Her very lips were numb.

"You know."

His sardonic laughter grated upon her horribly.

"Sometimes, my wild bird, I think I know a great deal. At other times—nothing! But this is not the time to talk of that. Have you forgotten that once before I saved you from the sum of your folly? I saved you from the Bear himself. I can save you from this! Go, now, before I telephone to the police that I came to call upon my friend—and found tragedy awaiting me. The halls are empty. Half a block away lies safety for you."

He smiled down at her.

"But for that boon, Maruska—Ah, your debt to me is mounting day by day!"

"Let me go!" she gasped piteously. "Alexis, let me go!"

He released her.

"Go!"

She fled. Fear winged her feet to spurn the long flights she sped down so swiftly. Luck guided her through deserted hallways. From Sheila's living room came lightly struck chords of a charming old waltz—a favorite of Nelson's. It struck her as the height of cruelty that she should be stumbling, fleeing through the dark, while Sheila played that lilting, happy tune in the security of her rosy, softly lit room. Played it, perhaps, to Alison's husband.

She had reached the ground floor when she found her path blocked. She must have looked pallid, desperate, horror-stricken, for the man who was mounting the stone steps started at sight of her and caught his breath.

"Alison! You here?"

She found herself clinging to her husband's arm.

"Take me away, Nel. Get me out of here."

She remembered inconsequently as he led her to the roadster at the curb and tucked her in, how easily, how coolly, he had swept her up into his arms one night during a fire panic in one of the smaller theaters. One always had a feeling of security with Nelson. He was an emergency person. The sort of man a woman—a feminine, unresourceful woman—clings to, trusts in. Only she had never been that sort of woman.

"Take me home," she begged.

His lean, somber profile darkened as he bent over the wheel. Home! What, he wondered, had happened to her? Was it possible that she had been to see Sheila, that a scene had resulted? Sheila! But whatever foolish, impulsive thing Sheila might have said or done, Alison would never have submitted to a scene. She could not be reduced to a vulgarity, he thought with a queer sort of pride.

"You'll not tell that you found me there?" she whispered, clinging to him with hot hands, stripped of their gloves.

"I'll do nothing you ask me not to do," he promised.

"Always remember, Nel, that I'm sorry for every pang I've ever caused you. Why did you let me go away? Why was I drawn into this horror?"

She must control herself. She was talking foolishly, disconnectedly.

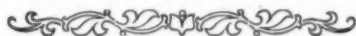
"You're in some sort of trouble, Alison. And I'm still—your husband. You haven't the right to hold me off. I must be permitted to help you."

They were drawing up before Miss Bolingbroke's door.

"It's all my fault, Nel," she told him brokenly. "My fault, and my folly. I can't drag you into it!"

But before he handed her over to the solicitude of the maid he wrested from her the promise that she would see him on the morrow.

TO BE CONTINUED.



QUESTION

IN spite of life's mad whirl,

There still are those

Who muse content upon a height

Where sea wind blows,

Or pause beside the pasture's quiet green

To look with childlike wonder at a rose.

Men call them foolish, but—who knows?

PAUL A. CHADWICK.

Sonnets to a Girl

By CHARLES NORMAN BLOOM

I.

WE who have talked of life and found it ill,
And, cynically wise, dissected it,
Uprooting here a creed, and bit by bit
Crumbled its mighty pillars at our will;
And we who have sought beauty on the hill,
Hearing the melancholy willows wail,
Or, breathless, watched the sunlit, slanted sail—
What will men say of us when we lie still,

Forgotten dust in some sad, quiet place,
Unmindful of the things that worked us pain?
Of me, who tingled once at your loved face,
Of you, whose beauty will not stir again,
And of our love? What will men say of us
Who loved for beauty's sake, and tremulous?

II.

SOMETIMES when I whisper your loved name,
A sweet rose lightly drawn along my lips,
I am aware how much your beauty grips,
And how much I must love you that you came.
I sought, in legends burning with the fame
Of Helen and of Troy's most splendid ships
Over whose sunken masts the lone gull dips,
A loveliness to fill my life with flame.

For this I dream of you when night comes down
With silent tread, and when soft shadows creep
Along the walls and houses of the town,
Veiled in the secret vastnesses of sleep;
Or make of your great beauty such a song
To stir the pulse of Helen, rose-blown long.



An Island Idyll

By Miriam Howell

Author of "Chinese Puzzle,"
"Suitors Who Don't Suit," etc.

CARTER VAN WYCK looked with little enthusiasm on the lady whom he had just rescued from a grave as watery as the Pacific Ocean could afford. Why, out of all the women who had shared the horror of that night with him, he should have selected this—this dud as the object of his chivalry, he couldn't imagine.

Not that she wasn't pretty and clever and distinguished, for she was—each and all of those—but she just didn't get by with Carter. She had sat opposite to him at the captain's table, and he had thought then, that of all the impudent flappers he had ever seen—

But to get back to the shipwreck. He had been one of a group of dilettant travelers, who had started out to see if the South Sea islands were all that they had been represented by that hardy explorer and harder bon vivant, Doctor Claptrap. Two nights before reaching their destination something peculiar had happened to the more intimate portions of the ship's anatomy and amid a hubbub that sounded like three a. m. at the Sixty Club, she had sunk rapidly and without a trace, in as pretty a little shipwreck seen around those parts in years.

Van Wyck had seen the girl clinging to a post in well-bred but heartfelt panic. He surrounded her with solicitude and a life belt, and clambered over the rail with her. Avoiding the crazy life boats and their crazier occupants, they had struck out blindly in, as it happened, exactly the right direction to find one of those dear little islands that are always lying around when you need them for a story like this.

For a detailed picture of how they got to the island, and what it looked like when they did, consult either of the Brady boys—Cyrus Townsend or William A. Suffice it to say that they did arrive, at no small personal inconvenience, and there they sat in the dawn and a state of unspeakable gloom, surveying the situation and each other in an annoyed manner.

"Of course, it's a little inaccessible, but it's nice when you get here, isn't it?" remarked Carter blandly.

A wave responded "phlup" politely, but the girl made no answer.

"If you were a good, out-of-town hostess, you'd ask me now if I didn't care to look the place over, and, strangely enough, that's just what I'm going to do. By the way," he continued, "I've stupidly forgotten your name. What is it again?"

"It isn't again; it's yet—Antoinette Griswold. Tony, I believe they call me in the society sections." A dimple near her mouth winked at him impertinently.

"Oh, yes, Miss Griswold, of course. Sorry! Well, you stay here and take a little shut-eye, and I'll be back anon—whenever that is." And he strolled away.

Tony Griswold—the name was associated with Park Avenue, the Ritz Roof, Lenox, smart dancing clubs, and the Social Register, in which the Griswold family was as firmly entrenched, unto the third and fourth generation, as his own. It vaguely suggested his sister's graduation from Miss Spence's. That was it! They had been rival débutantes, in that horrible younger set which he had

always avoided. "Flapper flagging" had been his favorite in-and-out-door sport. But he knew from what he had heard of Tony, that she was one of that species whose hearts are as warm as their heads are cool; who know much that they shouldn't and more that they should; who are sturdy and exotic at the same time; who think like boys and feel like girls; who are flabby neither in body nor mind; who can smoke as many cigarettes, down as many cocktails, and drive a tack, a golfball, or a high-powered motor as easily as a man—in short, the *jeune fille* of this day and degeneration.

Carter had time to speculate upon these things, with comments of a private and unprintable nature, as he strolled along the shore. He came to a path that led inland, scrambled up a little rise, and came upon the inevitable hut.

By using as a battering ram the shoulders which had been the pride of the Harvard line, and kicking with the legs which had simply annihilated Bailey's Beach—that locates our hero nicely, doesn't it?—he banged in the door and found that the hut had all the appearances of having been recently and very comfortably lived in. A cot, a soft, pillow-decked divan, rugs, chairs, a rickety table, and, on a shelf, forty-six of the varieties, helped to make that hut everything it should be in a case like this. On the table lay some papers that identified the owner. He picked these up and hurried back to the beach to find his companion. She waited for him with her hands folded disconsolately in her lap, looking like Billie Burke at the end of the second act when love seems slipping out of her grasp.

"Come on up and have breakfast," he shouted. "I've found a house, and canned food, and whom the island belongs to, and everything."

As they hurried up the path he explained to her that the place was the

property of that well-intentioned but misguided gentleman who had first conceived the radio, who, overcome by remorse, had gone there to hide from a world he had made hideous.

"He's evidently been gone just a few weeks, from his diary—he *would* keep a diary—and he says in it that ships pass by here every ten days or so. We'll have no trouble being rescued. He always signals by means of the old, familiar bonfire—no island home should be without one—and they see it, and come and pick him up, and carry him back to so-called civilization, where he stays until his Frankenstein drives him back here. And, really, the cabin is absolutely the stuff. We can get along splendidly until some far-sighted captain stages our rescue. Page Joseph Conrad! It's a shame to let him miss it."

"That's grand," replied Tony. "I'm afraid you wouldn't have turned out so well in the rôle of one of those Robert W. Chambers boys, who can't put in his own studs at home, but who acts like a whole Swiss Family Robinson when you get him stranded on a desert island."

By this time they had reached the hut and there, with their first breakfast, began a life, which, so far as the passing of time was concerned, seemed like a continuous performance of "Back to Methuselah."

They refused to behave in the manner traditional of castaways. Love did *not* dawn. Passion was *not* awakened. They hadn't the slightest desire to wed primitively—in the sight of Heaven, I believe they call it—as befitted two children of nature in that land where the sand was whiter, the sky bluer, the spray more Tiffanyesque, than any they had ever seen. Nor, on the other hand, did they snarl over the food, nor struggle against the terrific urge to push each other into the sea.

They were simply bored to suffoca-

tion with each other! They were consistently polite, desperately cheerful, and acutely ennuied. Tony's line had been permanently disconnected. Carter's well-known wit sparkled with all the brilliance of a senile glowworm. At home they might have—probably would have—fallen very much in love. Here, they were just not interested.

They explored the cabin eleven times a day, the island eight. The scion of the Van Wycks could *not* make handy knickknacks for the home out of bits of bark, pebbles, and a bamboo shoot. The flower of the Griswolds was unable to toss together a burlap bag and three skins, and evolve a creation that would make Herman Patrick Tappé grind his molars in envy. As the hero and heroine of a desert island story, they were simply hopeless.

Carter made the bonfire bigger and better than ever each day. And at last came the fateful morning, which was to turn the too-even tenor of their way into a whole quartet. It was the beginning of their third week in their "little island paradise," as Tony insisted on calling it. Carter was starting for the beach, armed with matches, binoculars, and a little light reading matter in the

shape of a six weeks' old rotogravure section. He paused in the doorway to watch Tony's struggles with a battered chest, which she had discovered hidden away in the storehouse. She was trying to open it with a rock, six shattered fingers, and a vocabulary that would have staggered a mule driver. Suddenly the cover gave way. He rushed to her side, startled by the expression on the girl's face. Together they peered into the chest. Treasure, real treasure, lay there, gleaming in the sunlight. The pulsing red of rubies, rich amethystine rays, the warm yellow of topaz shone back into their startled eyes. Their gaze met. Indifference vanished; boredom disappeared. Thrilled, incredulous, they stared with eyes that now saw in each other a new, delightful comrade. At last they had "something in common." The wondrous secret which they shared drew them together irresistibly.

Carter stretched out his arms and Tony flew into them, as one who has just discovered where woman's place really is. And as he rested his cheek tenderly on her ruffled hair Carter murmured ecstatically:

"And every bottle of it is pre-war!"

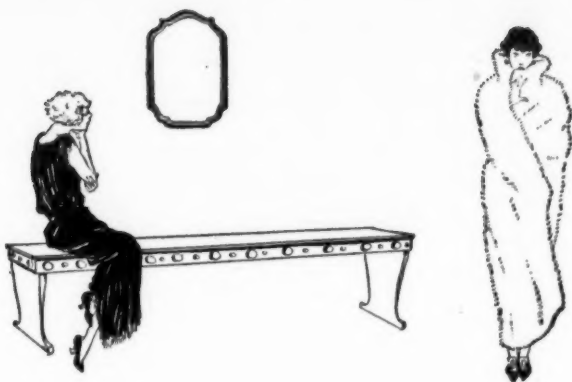


IN THE CAFÉ

OH, nevermore shall we—as on that night,
The small table between, the wild song beating—
Flow each on each, merged in one round of light,
Eyes pledging the eternal in the fleeting.
No more the rapture of the unsaid word,
Stayed on your subtle lip, shall sting my heart,
Nor voice of deeps in me no man has heard
Cry for the chase, the capture, and the dart.

Yet suddenly the drab and lonely day
Flames blue. I see your eyes, as once 'neath far
Dim skies my soul that watched the night away
Flung back bright echoes to the morning star;
I feel your kiss, as birds on homing wing
Wheel northward on the wind that wakes the spring.

CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER.



Jade Fangs

By Jessie Henderson

Author of "Mouth of the Dragon," "The Key Word," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE.

Mary Duke, about to marry Parker Talbot, society man and commissioner of police, on the eve of her wedding, in response to a phone call from Henrietta Ladue, notorious widow of a famous ward politician, went to Mrs. Ladue's apartment alone at midnight. Finding that she was to be blackmailed for a forged letter, supposed to have been written by her to her chauffeur, Malone, desperate because of her approaching marriage, in an effort to recover the letter, Mary struck Mrs. Ladue with a heavy cigarette box and fled the apartment. Next morning—her wedding morning—Mary received a note from Malone, bidding her hold her tongue about the Ladue affair, and threatening Talbot's life if she revealed what had happened. Terrified for her fiancé's safety, she gave the desired pledge. As she came out of the church on her husband's arm, Mary's eye caught the headlines of an afternoon paper carried by a newsboy who had stopped to watch the wedding party emerge. Staring at her in big black type, she saw the words: "Henrietta Ladue murdered!"

IT seemed to Mary in the days which followed that there was constantly a hand upon her shoulder, a voice that ever whispered at her ear: "Be careful!" She felt herself surrounded by walls none the less relentless because invisible; walls against which her dazed mind beat itself in a frenzy of bewilderment and despair.

An impulse so strong that it was all she could do to resist it bade her tell the whole story at once to Parker. Twice she opened her lips to begin the dreadful confession, but the memory of Ma-

lone's threat closed her teeth on the first word. She realized now, that when she had made the compact of silence with Malone the man had supposed she knew of Henrietta Ladue's death; and she realized, also, now in what deadly earnest the threat against the commissioner was penned. Malone, blackmailer, forger, and worse, could not afford to be mixed up in even the fringe of a murder.

If she could confess without naming Malone—— But no. She dared not leave him out, for the very reason that

it was vital Parker should know his identity, if he was to protect him. Or—if she confessed everything to Parker and thereby stopped the murder investigation altogether? Again Mary determined to tell him the grim events of the night before their wedding, and again she hesitated. There was no question that Parker's love for her would make him halt the investigation immediately, but could he halt it even when he tried? The reform commissioner, the man who held his office on the promise to clean up the town—if he gave the orders necessary to prevent the solving of a murder, would not such a procedure attract the very suspicions it was intended to avert? Wouldn't it breed innuendo even more than reproach?

Agonizing though she found the situation at present, Mary saw that the slightest false move on her own part might make it a thousand times worse. She decided at last that it would be insane to take any action whatever until she had first had a chance to consult Malone. "Keep your mouth shut and it will all die down," his letter had said. Where was Malone? She didn't know. Until she found out she must keep her mouth shut; though, except for Parker's sake, she would rather shriek the facts for all the world to hear and pass judgment upon.

At the sunny camp in the Adirondacks, where Parker had taken his bride for their honeymoon, Henrietta Ladue and all her kind seemed unreal. Sunshine, sunshine dropping dappled upon the woodsy path; sunshine burnishing the lake to sapphire sparkles; sunshine making of the ragged peaks and the infinite blue sky things as clean, as freshly washed in beauty, as the first day of the world. Such a golden glory flooded the earth that there seemed no chance for a dark spot anywhere—no spot more dark than the fragrant green shade beneath the ferns, or the pale

bronze of the cathedral aisles between the pines.

In the rough simplicity of his camp, which had the maximum of comfort with the minimum of luxury, Parker Talbot lost the keen watchfulness of the "Kid Glove Commissioner;" he lost the debonair conventionality of the man whose name and millions had made him, almost against his will, a leader of society. Broiling a steak at the great stone fireplace—the intrusion of servants was no part of their idyl—flinging himself into the lake for a morning swim, or striding along the trail, Parker seemed, somehow, to be a part of the forest which he knew so well. Here was a man, Mary told herself; a man clean and fine as a fir tree. Married to a woman whose hands—

She shuddered. The thing was too horrible. In her brain, like a pulse, the word beat constantly—now so loudly it seemed half audible, now subconsciously: murder, murder, murder. In sudden passion she told herself that the Ladue woman had not been fit to live; that she had never dreamed her blow would do more than stun this laughing enemy; that lawyers would talk of second degree, and lack of intent. Still the word beat within her soul. Whatever her intent or lack of it, the fact remained. A life had been snuffed out, as you blow out a match. Henrietta Ladue was dead.

With her old-time frankness, Mary tried to reconstruct her own intention at the moment when she had struck at the Ladue woman's triumphant face. The one thought in her mind had been to get the letter. She did not even recall picking up the heavy cigarette box, though she did remember the sickening thump of it upon that blue-veined temple. A furious, frantic creature, striking out in despair and rage, striking with a sharp-edged box and striking harder than she knew—it sounded like the plea and the defense of any other

killer. Killer! The word turned her cold. She had not meant to kill! She had not meant to kill! This comfort, at least, was hers—and only this.

The shadow upon her gray face vanished swiftly. It retreated to the innermost depths of her clear blue eyes as Parker's canoe grated on the shore. Not to let him guess she was anything but happy as a bride should be—this was now her care. Just for a moment she stepped out of range of his vision. She must have an instant in which to pull on the mask, to force a smile upon a quivering mouth, to rub color into her cheeks. Her gaze, as if seeking help, rested on the mile-wide stretch of Parker's forest lands, that dipped into the valley and swept like velvet up a mountain, to disappear over its edge. Tragedy seemed far away from the serenity of this spot.

After all, she reflected, more than a week had passed. The newspapers, which she insisted on Parker bringing her from the village, were already wearying of the case as no new clew developed. Henrietta had been beautiful and notorious, but she possessed friends as few as her scruples. Mary gathered from the news columns that none of the woman's coterie was clamoring for either justice or vengeance, and she could read between the lines an eagerness on the part of the political ring and underworld element to let the matter drop as soon as decently possible. This lack of vengeful spirit amazed the girl until she reflected that, from their viewpoint, there were several of their own members who might have killed Mrs. Ladue, for various reasons, and that their policy was to hush up these little family affairs. Investigating them directed too much attention to things that were better left uninvestigated. Besides, when you began digging into a murder you never knew what valuable henchman, powerful politician, or otherwise prominent citizen you might turn

up. *Requiescat*. That was the right idea.

So now that Henrietta Ladue's photographs had been on the news pages for a week, and her funeral had been attended by most of the people in town who didn't know her, and by significantly few of those who did—*requiescat*. The coroner's jury said she had come to her death by a heavy instrument in the hands of a person or persons unknown.

Malone's suggestion, then, was correct. It would die down. It was well on the way to that end now.

In answer to Parker's brisk halloo, Mary darted along the path to meet him at the shore. Her brown knickers and orange sweater flashed down the piney knoll on which the camp stood, and her splendid aureole of auburn hair shone in the afternoon sun—a very gay figure indeed, a bit hysterical in its gayety, if one were critical, she slid over the last bank of needle glaze and into Parker's arms.

"Oof!" he remarked in mock consternation, staggering grotesquely under the impact.

His bride buried her face on his shoulder so that he would not see the misery in her eyes.

"So sorry," she apologized, stepping carefully on his feet; "you're not used to steam rollers and such?"

"Once in France I was chased by a tank," he admitted, and lifted Mary's face. Midway to her lips he stopped. "Don't look so glum, dearest," he said; "it didn't catch me." His kiss muffled the laugh that struggled with a gulp in her throat. "Or is that why?"

Mary refused to answer.

"Heck, I suppose you're getting tired of me," said Parker resignedly. "Would you mind standing on your own feet, dear? Thanks! Well, if you're really tired of me, I have good news for you."

He wouldn't tell what it was till, supper over, they sat out on the knoll

watching the last magnificent flare of sunset fade behind the mountains of the opposite shore. The sky swam in violet and crimson light beneath which the lake, smooth as a polished metal disk, lay flooded with reflections that took on a tinge of watery silver. Black pines like marching soldiers stood up against the sky, outlining the lower mountain ridges. Waterfowl cried, high and mournful in the darkening zenith. The cool evening air was filled with balsam fragrance, with a drift of pungent smoke from their own chimney, and with the scent of vines drenched in dew. A speckle of stars appeared, remote and pale. Quiet folded all the earth, a quiet the deeper for the murmur of crickets and faint lipping of the lake beneath its banks.

Encircled by Parker's arm, her face lifted to the soft night wind, Mary half yielded to the spell of peace. Her rigid nerves relaxed ever so little; the feverish light went out of her eyes. At such a moment as this, sometime, she would tell Parker the whole story; sometime when he was no longer police commissioner, no longer in danger from men like Malone. To meet his smile, his honest gaze, with this secret between them was something not to be endured. All her life she had loved frankness. Sometime she would tell him when the danger to himself had passed. Life with him otherwise would be impossible; the deception, no less than the deed, was driving her mad.

Fortunately, the newspapers remained reassuring. Those brought from the village to-day had been almost cynically perfunctory in their reference to the Ladue case. The journals which supported the reform administration merely said that the police were hard at work on the mystery. The anti-administration journals, compelled by the irony of fate to be silent when they would rather have sneered at the kid glove commissioner because no arrests had yet been

made, adopted the attitude that the Ladue case was another one of those mysteries which would, in all likelihood, never be solved.

Mary stirred in the crook of Parker's arm.

"I wish you'd give up your job," she said suddenly, successful in giving her voice the proper casual tone.

Parker looked down at her in amazement.

"Why, Mary!" he said. There was a hint of hurt pride in the words, though he followed them up lightly enough with: "Sorry you married a sleuth?"

"Yes, I am," Mary rejoined. "Of course, I'm tremendously proud of you, dear, but—" She stopped. If she said she wanted him to resign because the job was dangerous, this would be the surest way to make him refuse. She knew his courage, and his pride, too well to risk that argument. "I'd like to go abroad," she went on slowly; "and now that you've got the department pretty well cleaned up—"

She realized that her hands were trembling, and clenched them fiercely in her lap.

"It's not a job I'd want to keep all my life," Parker conceded, "but you'd hate to have me back down before my work's finished." The silence deepened between them. Parker waited to hear her assent, but she could not force herself to speak. "And," he went on at last, "my work's far from finished yet."

"Which brings us to the good news I mentioned a while ago." He laughed and drew her closer, but in the faint light Mary could see around his mouth the grim lines that came there when things at police headquarters went wrong. "It's good news, provided you're tired of—of our honeymoon," he added. The raillery in his tone failed to hide the regret beneath.

"Parker! If you talk that way, I won't listen!" Mary kissed the chin

that had suddenly taken on a belligerent angle. "What on earth are you talking about, anyway?"

"It's too bad, dear, but I'll have to go back to town," said Parker. Mary grew rigid in his arms. Her heart seemed to stop, to hang like a leaden lump in her breast. As though he had already spoken, she knew what he was going to say.

"The Ladue murder," he began, "you've read about it, of course? Henrietta Ladue was a sort of clearing house for most of the schemes pulled off by the underworld politicians. There's something big in back of her murder—bigger than mere private revenge. Reagan, who is ostensibly in charge of the investigation, has been doing his best to block every investigator. This means that he thinks what I think—clearing up the Ladue murder will break up the worst and most powerful gang in the city. It will mean half a dozen of the big crooks, politicians who have the town under their thumb, implicated in one way or another. In short, clearing up the Ladue murder means a long step toward cleaning up the town."

He paused, but Mary did not comment on what he had said.

"As you have heard," he continued, trying to joke her out of silence, "cleaning up the town is my particular job at the moment."

Still Mary said nothing.

"And so—" he began.

"No, no, no!" Mary choked, clutching him with desperate fingers. "You mustn't—you can't—" She broke into wild sobs, the wilder for being repressed so long, and threw herself upon his breast, imploring, incoherent, frantic.

Parker held her to him with a firmness that at last steadied her shaking limbs. He wiped her tears away, gently as her own mother could have done it, and kissed her sobbing lips into quiet. She

closed her eyes and leaned against him, exhausted.

"Dear heart," she heard him say, "it's those damnable dances and parties and dressmakers and all the other tortures you women go through when you're getting ready to be married. You're worn out. I'm dreadfully disappointed that we must go back to town so soon, but after a while we can come back here again—"

Mary put her hands on his shoulders and held herself away from him. He was speaking as he would speak to an excitable child, whom fatigue had made unreasonable.

"Dear, let me tell you something," Mary said. She would tell him now; she dared not delay longer. The words rushed to her tongue. "It was—" And suddenly, almost tangibly, the hand upon her shoulder; almost audibly, the voice of terror at her ear—the voice that said: "Be careful." Before her eyes appeared Malone's solemn warning, and the hard, resolute face of the man himself. Cold fear gripped her again; fear not so much for herself as for her husband. "Oh, Parker, I love you so!" she cried. "Forgive me, you don't understand—"

As if she were indeed a child, Parker picked her up and carried her to the cabin.

"We've sat there till you're chilled," he scolded her lovingly, throwing wood upon the hearth. He made her lie down on the cushioned settle before the crackling fire, wrapped her round with blankets, brought hot tea to still the chattering of her teeth. In the flickering firelight her face gleamed white beneath its ruddy hair, but she forced her tight lips to smile at him.

Anxious to justify himself, he explained again patiently, why he must go back to town at once. It was the only honorable thing. The situation was a challenge to his good faith. Without him, the investigation would collapse.

Afterward, if she wished, he would resign. They'd go to Fiesole.

His face settled into bleak and harassed lines. For a long while, his hand on hers, he sat staring into the fire.

"I'm going to take personal charge of the investigation," he said. "I'll get at the bottom of this case if it's the last thing I do." From an inside pocket of his coat he drew forth a bill fold, riffled through the documents, and took out a fold of tissue paper.

"Strange," he mused. Then: "Of course, you won't breathe this to any one, dear. Here's something that was picked up at the Ladue apartment. It may be a clew. I've seen something like it, but I can't, for the life of me, remember where."

He unfolded the paper and held it toward her. Mary choked back a scream. In her husband's palm lay one of the little jade fangs from her brocaded silk wrist bag.

Like some plaything of doom in an old Greek drama, Mary went back to town; drawn by inexorable forces to the very scenes she would avoid, the very pitfalls which might so easily prove fatal to her. Worried by her tense eyes, Parker begged his bride to go away from the city clamor. Lacking the courage to turn her back upon the danger, Mary gave her mother's slow convalescence as excuse for remaining in the city, and spent as much time as possible with the invalid. There was comfort in this, though the thought of what the truth would do to that patient, gentle face was a sword turned in her daughter's heart.

Immediately on his return, Parker threw himself into the task of solving the Ladue riddle. He went over the Ladue apartment himself with experts who examined the furnishings with a microscope, tried to pick out the important finger prints from the confused mass of impressions made by police

detectives after the murder, and took multitudinous careful measurements. He shelved the police detectives formerly at work on the case and engaged his own investigators. Dissatisfied with the hasty verdict of the coroner's jury, he arranged for another autopsy under the direction of physicians too well established to be intimidated by big or little politics.

Mary looked on, stupefied, at these activities. Her one reassurance was that, if every individual in town were lined up for inspection, she would be the last upon whom public suspicion, or that of the commissioner, would light. Her brocaded silk wrist bag she burned, bit by bit, in her boudoir fireplace, and almost at once regretted the action. Suppose some one asked to see it? The bits of jade with which it was hung were harder to dispose of, and she carried them around with her for a whole day, quaking. At last, on a sudden inspiration, she dropped them into the opening of a gutter culvert when she crossed the street after dark. The forged blackmailing letter, however, she locked carefully away. It might be needed sometime as—as evidence.

If only she could see Malone, for the devising of some way out of this quicksand! She was to see him sooner than she supposed.

Meanwhile, a certain amount of entertaining was expected of the season's most popular bride. Once again her mother's illness served as an excuse for much inactivity, but, suddenly panic-stricken lest she appear to behave in any way that might be thought otherwise than perfectly natural, Mary began to go out more, and to give a few little dinner dances in her new home.

It was a delightful new home, patterned after the best colonial type of old New York, and set down in the proper section of the East Sixties. Its gracious, white-columned doorway was a hint of the hospitable beauty and light-

ness of the interior; a house full of wide rooms where dignity was never allowed to become too obtrusive for comfort. White-paneled woodwork gave a bridelike as well as a colonial air to the walls and doors, and to the quaint corner cupboards that were built into every available nook where the brightness of books or the soft old silvery tints of pewter were desirable. Pale yellows and a peculiar deep blue, against which Mary's hair and skin were glorious, formed the basis of the color scheme. An unostentatious place, and strikingly simple for the richest young society couple in town, yet a place which, somehow, reflected the gay candor, which till so recently had been Mary's chief attribute.

She feared the open simplicity of her new home sometimes, with a fear that was becoming an obsession. In those cheerful, sunny rooms there seemed no shadowy corners where she could creep when telltale thoughts stamped guilt upon her face. As a matter of fact, the strain of the past few weeks was hurrying her toward collapse. When, as frequently happened, she came upon a member of headquarters staff—Reagan, or one of the newer and more zealous investigators—waiting in the reception hall for a word with the commissioner on some clew which had developed after he left the office, it was increasingly difficult to repress a start of horror. About Reagan, especially, there was something which she instinctively feared; a covert menace in his half-closed eyes, a relentless thrust to his heavy jowl. Yet toward Reagan of all people she ought to have felt gratitude; for his own deep purposes he was doing everything in his power to prevent a solution of the Ladue affair. To prevent, at least, any solution toward which the commissioner moved.

She was annoyed, but knew her annoyance to be a shield for fright, at finding Reagan seated in the reception

hall when she passed through it one evening to see if everything was in readiness for the half dozen guests who were coming for dinner. He rose and greeted her civilly enough. Perhaps it was her own uneasiness which gave her the impression that his narrowed eyes were unusually watchful. Because she was afraid of showing the fear he roused, she stood chatting with him so long that one of her guests, De Paola, the sculptor, arrived before she was aware how much time had elapsed.

"Ah-h! The po-lice. Si!" De Paola exclaimed, his dark eyes glistening and his carefully trimmed little black beard quivering, as always, with animation. "I am much interested in po-lice. Many times I have had affairs with them." His eloquent eyebrows gestured a hint of some dark past before he threw his head back with a short laugh. "Once, it is true, an ancestor of mine was chief of police in Ravenna. But that was long ago, and he had an entire army to ride at the head of, and he wore mooch gold lace. He was not a good police. He stole ver' mooch whatever he could, and gave it to his friends. It is so different to-day."

Mary, cold with fear lest Reagan take offense, tried to usher the vivacious dilettante into the drawing-room. But De Paola was in fine feather. He but-tonholed Reagan.

"And do you think they fired him for it?" the little sculptor went on. "No, per Bacco! They gave him three titles and a statue. The titles were well enough, but the statue—— To see it is to resolve on an honest life."

"Yeah?" said Reagan.

"I assure you," De Paola assured him. "But I perceive you and my wicked ancestor have one thing in common: you collect gems." He pointed to a diamond the size of a locomotive headlight—gift, as it happened, of a conspicuous politician for an inconspicuous service. Mary bit her lip. With an irony quite

beyond Reagan's comprehension, De Paola was poking fun at the burly captain for her benefit. Under other circumstances she might have smiled quietly. But now she was faint with apprehension.

"It is praiseworthy," De Paola purred on, "to wear the gems suited to one's personality. I still possess some of the jewels which my po-lice forefather—er—acquired. They were well suited to him. One in especial—"

In desperation Mary interrupted.

"I want your opinion before the others come on a little statuette which seems to be Etruscan. It's in the library. And you can tell me at the same time what jewels are suited to my personality, if you like."

"Emeralds," he answered instantly, appraising her clear skin and auburn hair and the silver sweep of her gown; "or, better, because the satin surface would suit you—jade. Why do you not wear jade a very great deal? I remember a few weeks ago you carried a little bag with jade ornaments, and when you held it near your face—" He blew a kiss from his fingers, to Reagan's heavy amusement. "Why do you not carry it always?"

Mary knew her face turned white. Reagan, accustomed to study faces, must notice it.

"Carry it with a dinner gown?" she asked lightly.

"No, but motoring, shopping, what you will. For my sake. No? But then as a matter of principle!"

There was nothing to do but laugh at the little man's exaggerated earnestness. Even Reagan smiled.

"It's broken," Mary answered; and then, filled with dismay at what she had said, she added hastily: "I'll try to have it mended. For the sake of principle." She smiled pleasantly.

She felt that her manner puzzled Reagan. He was still eying her when the commissioner's entrance drew his at-

tention and his scowl. Reagan was a poor hand at hiding his feelings.

To Mary the evening dragged out like a nightmare, an interminable stretch of vague, ever-present fear. De Paola innocently added to the weight that was crushing her. He seemed possessed of a devil that made him chatter, chatter about jewels. Mary felt sick with dread lest he refer again to her wrist bag—as he did once, but quite casually—in such a way as to remind Parker where he had seen the curious jade ornament picked up at Mrs. Ladue's.

Parker himself came to dinner with an abstracted air and gave only the most perfunctory attention to De Paola's enthusiasm for police and gems.

"It is gems more than the mere pleasure of travel which bring me to America this time," De Paola vouchsafed, chattering whether any one listened or not. "I seek the unusual. Perhaps the po-lice could assist? You find specimens in pawnshops, stolen, it may be, and never claimed? One could, perhaps, purchase? At least, you must have a collection at your po-lice office which one might be permitted to examine? I am ver' mooch interested in such things."

Parker laughed.

"Police headquarters isn't exactly a jeweler's shop," he replied. "Anyway, what jewels come into our hands are usually an ordinary type. You'd be surprised at what a lack of artistic flair there is among our American criminals."

"Ah, ah! You banter me," said De Paola with his short chuckle. "It is because my criminal great-great-grrrrreat grandpapa had such discrimination. Si? He was a ver' great collector. It caused his death at last."

Parker broke in on the gusty sigh over grandpapa's untimely taking off.

"Once in a while the police come across an unusual bit of jewelry—in the pursuance of their duty, I mean"—

this in deference to De Paola's ironic grin—"and, if you're really interested, I might show you an odd trinket or two."

"Ah, please!" De Paola's animation fairly crackled. "Sometime for a special reason I desire to tell you about my own collection; it is too long and personal a matter to speak of now. And I will tell you about the gems which my great-grandpapa, that artistic old criminal po-lice, was given by his friends, and one which was given him by a subtle enemy. It will amuse you."

De Paola lifted his coffee cup and peered into its depths owlishly.

"It is too bad there was not prohibition in Ravenna in grandpapa's day. He would have collected so many more pretty things," he observed so ingenuously that his words roused a gale of laughter.

Even more weary in spirit than in nerves, Mary saw with relief the last of her guests depart. It had been a ghastly evening. She felt that, if there were many more such, she would scream out her secret above the inconsequential gossip of the dinner table. To sit there and play the gracious hostess when every mouthful of food choked on the knowledge that Henrietta Ladue was—

"Get a good rest, kitten," Parker had said, seating himself at his desk. "I've got a couple of hours' work on the Ladue case."

"Oh, Parker!" she moaned. "Oh, Parker!"

He kissed her pale face.

"Sleep late, honey. I'll give orders that you're not to be disturbed. You've got to get rid of that whitish look."

She went slowly to her room, the very effort of walking seeming too much of a task. Sleep! She hated sleep because of the dreams that came. For a few minutes she stood in the middle of her boudoir, face buried in her hands, body drooping. Where would this all lead? When would it end?

After a while she became conscious

that a gentle, persistent tapping had been going on for some time. Tap, tap, tap, tap. Rain on the window, perhaps. A quiet, summer-night shower. Too weary to investigate, she rang for her maid. As she did so there came the snapping of fingers, and a faint hiss:

"Psst!"

Turning quickly, her heart in her throat, Mary saw the curtain on the half-open French window flutter as if in signal. The tapping, then, had been a finger nail on the window pane.

Physical terror was among the things Mary did not know. She stepped to the window and threw it open. The man on the tiny balcony behind it was Malone.

He entered the boudoir swiftly, put a finger to his lip by way of warning, dropped to the floor, and rolled silently beneath a chaise longue. Antoinette, responding to the summons almost at once, found her mistress, enveloped in a negligee of peacock blue, closing the French window. There had been just time to convert the chaise longue into a hiding place by dropping a shawl over its foot.

"Brush my hair, Antoinette," said Mary, "and then you may go." She sank upon the chaise longue and lay there with eyes closed while Mary brushed out the ripply length of burnished hair till it shone like ruddy copper.

It was thus that Parker found her a minute later when, with Reagan at his elbow, he knocked for admission. Mary started to her feet and drew the negligee closer. So this was the explanation!

"Don't be frightened, dear," Parker said. "Captain Reagan's men thought they saw some one prowling about the grounds."

Reagan strode across the floor and flung the window wide, revolver in hand.

"Seen any one?" he demanded, turning to where Mary stood.

"Why, no," Mary replied, sinking again to the chaise longue where she sat

rigid as a statue. "There's—there's certainly no one on the balcony, for I looked out there just now when I closed the window."

"That's funny," Reagan said, addressing his chief. "I thought he slunk around this end of the house and might 'ave climbed up, somehow. I'm sure I saw him."

"Why," Mary said, trying to make her voice even, "I saw some one, too. At least, I thought it was a shadow, but it might have been some one gliding across the yard."

"Which way?" Reagan jerked in his peremptory tones.

"To the right," said Mary, "and down the street."

Reagan instantly bounded from the room, with a quickness surprising in one of his burly bulk.

"Don't be frightened, dear," Parker begged.

Mary's smile was reassuring.

"I'm not," she answered; "only tired out. Not all the burglars in town could keep me from sleeping to-night."

"It isn't a——" Parker began, and thought better of the explanation. "I'll have the house guarded," he added, his hand on the doorknob.

"No, no!" Mary cried so vehemently that he turned in surprise. "Oh, please, don't," she went on more calmly; "I'd feel like a prisoner. There's no danger." How was she to get Malone away from here if they set a guard? "It's too silly," she scoffed.

"All right—just a little guard," Parker promised. "I'll be up all night myself, anyway, working on some reports that Reagan just brought. Good night, dear."

She dismissed the maid and locked the door and Malone rolled out from beneath the chaise longue.

"You're game, all right," he acknowledged admiringly. "Now, listen——"

His story needed little telling. Somehow the police had suspected him of

killing Henrietta; the detectives were on his heels; they'd chased him uptown and downtown and into all his haunts till, at his wits' end, he decided to hide in the police commissioner's own house. He grinned at the joke of it.

"I didn't tell," Mary panted.

"I know you didn't," Malone said. "It's one of them new detectives your husband put on the case that got wind of me. You remember what I wrote you?" Mary nodded dumbly. "Well, that still goes. If I'm pinched, I'll tell everything. And, if I'm pinched, some of my gang will kill the commissioner."

Mary hid her face from the deadly earnest of Malone's cold eyes.

"Don't lose your nerve—not right now," Malone whispered fiercely as Mary swayed. He steadied her with a hand on her elbow. "Any fool can see it's easier for me to beat it than to get the commissioner killed. I ain't anxious to be mixed up in more than one murder at a time. Now, here's the idea: I'll fade while Reagan's chasin' my shadow down the street and before them guards gets picketing round the house. I only dropped in"—he grinned again—"to lay low for a few minutes and to tell you to keep on keepin' your mouth shut. Get me?"

"Malone, I can't," Mary faltered. "Sometime I've got to tell my husband. I can't live unless I tell him."

Malone was inclined to be magnanimous.

"Oh, sure, tell him the whole story—sometime," he replied; "but wait till he's out of office. Get me? It's safer. If he finds it out before—— Well, I'll be on the other side of the world by then, anyway. Put out the light. I'm going to make a break for it."

Her hand at the electric switch, Mary paused. "Where were you—that—night?" she asked.

"Say, I was right there in Ladue's place," Malone confessed; "in the next room. I wasn't to come in till later. I

seen the whole thing. Ladue left her front door open and I got there right after you did."

"The—whole—thing?"

"Sure! Through the crack of the door. You found the front door of the apartment still open? I left it like that, in case of a quick get-away. Sure, I was in the next room when it happened."

A shudder twisted Mary's face.

"She didn't die right away, you know," Malone continued. "When you hit her with that box she staggered, sort of, and fell across the table. After you locked the door on her she started to get up and fell onto the table again. I went over to her and she was dead all right. I was wondering what to do when I heard you outside the door again, and I thought you might have a cop with you, so I beat it down the fire escape."

"Not me—you didn't hear me," Mary said; "it was some man."

"Honest? Another caller? Sure was Ladue's busy evening." He motioned later to put out the light and an instant later she saw him dimly outlined against the opening window. Cautiously he slid over the balcony balustrade and disappeared. Hands clenched, heart pounding, Mary strained her ears to catch a challenge or the thud of running feet. There was not a sound.

Next morning, before she rang for breakfast, Mary, inspired by a sudden thought, took the hearth brush from beside the fireplace in her room, and carefully swept the floor of the little balcony. There was a slight mold of leaves from the elm in the yard, and she grew faint at sight of a heel print upon it. This she quickly obliterated, and even remembered to brush the balustrade free of possible finger prints.

She was still at breakfast in her boudoir when the maid announced Reagan. Very important. He must see her immediately.

"Alone," he said, entering on the maid's heels and giving the French woman such a look that she fled without further command.

Mary summoned her coolest cordiality. Reagan, however, paid no attention to the amenities but plunged into his subject.

"Mrs. Talbot, I'm here——"

"So I see." Mary's voice held some of the old-time spirit. "I'm not accustomed to receive callers so early, Captain Reagan, in this room. My husband——"

"He's out," said Reagan, easing his considerable bulk into a chair and placing his cap between his feet. "I'm here because I wanted to see you while the commissioner was gone. You had a chauffeur once named Malone. Where is he?"

The keen glance which accompanied the sharp question challenged Mary's courage. And her courage rose to meet the emergency. Here sat a bitter enemy of Parker, and of herself.

Opening her deep blue eyes candidly, she answered:

"He was discharged by the head chauffeur, I believe, months ago. Why?"

"When did you see him last?" His manner was that of headquarters—the detective questioning a prisoner. Mary could not but marvel at this lack of deference to his superior's wife.

"At about the time he was discharged, I suppose."

"Not since?"

"Not that I remember." What insolently piercing little eyes!

"Remember your wedding day?"

"Naturally." A brief pause. Did he know about the dropped glove? Would it be better to admit—— "Oh, of course. I saw Malone in the crowd that day. He picked up something that—that I dropped."

"Seen him since?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"Why—driving somebody's car, I imagine."

"Yes, you do."

"Do—what?"

"You do imagine." Reagan's heavy mouth gave a grudging smile. It was not a pleasant smile, either.

Mary sprang from her chair.

"Captain Reagan!"

"Don't get excited," Reagan said, not rising. He fixed her with a steely glance. "Malone was here last night."

Mary's mouth went dry. For her life, she could not have uttered a word.

"It was him we were chasing," Reagan went on methodically, "and he hid in this house."

"But—how——" She had to stop and swallow. "How could he?"

"I was just goin' to ask you that."

"What!" Mary's astonishment was well done.

"He was in this room."

Mary's laugh rang out a trifle too late, and too hollow.

"That's absurd."

Reagan got up heavily, went to the French window, and looked out on the balcony. "Do you always sweep this yourself, Mrs. Talbot?" he inquired. "One of my men saw you. And do you always sweep it so early in the morning?" He looked the balcony over with care, closed the window, and faced her. "What made you sweep it?"

Mary shrugged.

"I thought——" She stopped. "It needed it."

Again Reagan gave his heavy smile.

"It sure did. Did you find any footprints?"

"No," Mary replied, brave enough to meet his gaze. "Would you mind telling me what on earth this is all about?"

"Glad to. Malone——" He broke off and bent forward. Dismayed, Mary saw that the all-concealing shawl had slipped from the end of the chaise longue and that Reagan's gaze fastened on

something beneath. In a stride he reached the couch, pushed it aside, and picked up something from the floor. It was a fragment of leaf mold, such as might have been brought in on a shoe. Without troubling to scan Mary's blanched face more than an instant, Reagan took an envelope from her desk, dropped the mold into it, and put the envelope into his pocket.

"Malone," he proceeded, as if there had been no interruption, "is mixed up in the Ladue murder."

Mary drew a choking breath.

"Malone is suspected of—killing Mrs. Ladue?"

"Oh, no," Reagan replied with an ugly laugh; "that's—the commissioner's dope. But it isn't mine. No, Malone didn't kill Ladue."

There fell a silence so profound that the little clock ticked busily across it.

"I notice you don't ask who did kill her," Reagan remarked. Mary made no sound. "I guess," Reagan said deliberately, "it ain't necessary—for you—to ask that."

He reached the door before Mary could force her quivering mouth to speak.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going down to headquarters, to ask the commissioner if it ain't kind of funny Malone was hidden in this house last night."

"Wait," Mary heard herself say in an odd voice; "I'll go with you." She dared not let him out of her sight, as she would not have dared turn her eyes away from a snake coiled to strike.

"Suits me," Reagan answered with jaunty insolence. "Might as well make it a family party."

As she went down the stairs at Reagan's heels Antoinette intercepted her. There had been a telephone message from De Paola. He could not meet her at the Florentine Galleries, after all, that morning. He was going to examine some rare gems at——

"Yes, yes! Never mind," Mary said dully; "another day will do." With Reagan she entered her motor like a woman walking in her sleep. Not a word passed between the two on the long ride far downtown to the granite fortress of headquarters. Neither threats nor appeals would have any effect on Reagan. He went with the air of a man who goes triumphantly to a well-earned victory.

Once when a child Mary had been caught by the rising tide on a little pinnacle of rock, from which a stray swimmer rescued her at the last minute. It seemed to her now, that she was watching the waters swirl round and round-about, rising steadily toward the last foothold with slow, relentless persistence. When the flood finally overwhelmed that pinnacle of safety what horror would follow?

The shadow of doom on his young wife's face brought Parker to his feet even before he realized the inexplicable presence and the still more, inexplicable manner of Captain Reagan. Mary half fainted in the commissioner's arms as he drew her to a chair beside his desk, and Parker turned with his sword-thrust glance to demand of Reagan the explanation. It would have to be a good one.

Briefly Reagan made his report. Parker heard him with a countenance grim in its amazement, while Mary sat with listless hands and eyes staring before her in stony despair. She might have been carved in marble.

Leaning against the desk, the commissioner folded his arms and studied the captain.

"You say that my wife sheltered Malone," he repeated slowly, in a manner far more threatening than an uttered threat itself. "You say she knew Malone was hidden in that room. Why should my wife hide him?"

Mary made a little, piteous gesture of entreaty. So closely were the two men

watching each other's eyes that they failed to notice it.

"Malone may have witnessed the murder of Ladue," Reagan suggested, his heavy jaw at a fighting angle.

"And what if he did?"

"Malone may have known who killed the Ladue woman."

"What if he did?"

Reagan smiled—a sinister curl of the thick lips.

"Your wife—your wife wouldn't want Malone to get arrested. He might tell who committed the murder."

"And who committed it?"

Mary tried to moan: "No—no!" But again the two failed to heed her.

Reagan spat out the word like a bullet from a gun. "You!"

With a scream, Mary sprang from the chair, eyes dilated, palms pressed to her cheeks. Was she going mad? Had she heard aright? Parker laid a soothing hand on her shoulder. His self-control seemed unshakable.

"How do you figure that out, Reagan?" he inquired in the grimmest tones Reagan had ever heard.

"On the night Ladue was killed you went to her apartment," Reagan began slowly. "The elevator man was half asleep, but he noticed you because you stopped for a moment in front of his cage and then walked upstairs. For reasons of my own, I had the Ladue place watched, off and on, by a couple of friends of mine that used to play cards in a house near there."

"You knew the Ladue crowd were trying to 'get' me, and you wanted to be in on the game," Parker suggested easily.

Reagan shrugged.

"Whatever my reason was, I had these two friends o' mine give the place a look whenever they went past. And one of 'em saw you come out o' there early in the mornin'." Anyways, he's ready to swear it was you.

"And, if that evidence ain't good

enough, one of the finger prints on the key outside Ladue's living-room door is the same as one of yours that I swiped off your inkwell yesterday."

For several seconds the commissioner weighed all this in silence. Then:

"What do you figure as my motive?"

"There was a little piece of torn paper in Ladue's hand when she was found. I know Ladue was going to try to get you, somehow, through blackmail. That's motive enough, even for a kid glove commissioner."

Still Parker kept his temper in leash.

"What you say is largely true," Mary heard him admit, to her speechless amazement. "Mrs. Ladue had telephoned me to come to her apartment. I refused, but later I decided to investigate. Unwisely, and on the impulse of the moment, I went to her place alone, without posting detectives—or notifying you, Reagan, when I'm sure you'd have been glad to help." Reagan acknowledged the sarcasm with a wry smile. "When I got there the elevator man seemed to be asleep. It occurred to me that, without letting him know of my presence—for I didn't care to be recognized unless it was necessary—I'd walk upstairs and reconnoiter. When I reached the Ladue apartment the door was open a crack."

Mary's gasp ended in a sob. It was Parker, then, who had crept past in the dark corridor. If only she had recognized him; if only she had flung herself into his arms with the whole terrible story!

"The living-room door was already locked on the outside. I opened it. Mrs. Ladue was already dead."

Reagan broke the silence.

"You mean to say you found her dead, and yet didn't call up headquarters! You, the police commissioner?"

"Exactly." Parker's crisp tone held no apology. "If I had called in the police under those circumstances, you know—nobody better—what version the

anti-reform crowd would have told of the incident. The same version you are telling me now. But, at that, if it hadn't been the night before my wedding, I'd have called headquarters and let your tongues wag all they pleased. That's what I ought to have done, of course, even though I knew some one would find her in a short while."

"You simply slid out without giving any alarm?"

"I did. I'm not proud of it, but I'm still not sure it wasn't the wise thing to do. Only I didn't count on your friends, the elevator man and the gamblers."

The heavy smile curled Reagan's lips again.

"The elevator man's no friend of mine. He was fast asleep before you left the house. It was one of your reform detectives that suggested I'd better listen to his story, little thinkin' who it was the elevator man had seen."

"May I ask," Parker inquired ironically, "why I was so eager to solve the Ladue murder, if I did it myself?"

Reagan snorted.

"A stall," he said. "You had to investigate it, didn't you? Especially when the old gang wanted to leave it lay? A stall. That's why." His eyes grew even more crafty. "But there's no need for tongues to wag. It's not necessary for me to tell what I know."

"Indeed?" Parker's polite curiosity had a chill in it. "What's your price?"

"Your resignation—that's all," said Reagan.

"Oh, is that all?" Parker inquired. "A fine chance you have of getting it."

The incredulous astonishment which stamped itself on Reagan's ruddy jowls was almost pathetic. Here was something new to his experience. Men didn't act that way. When you got something on them they bowed to the inevitable. He had no words for this sort of thing.

"And, since you're so good at running down clews," said Parker, "maybe you

can help me find the owner of this. I picked it up that morning outside Mrs. Ladue's door." He reached into his pocket and drew out a fold of tissue paper, and before Mary could stop him spilled on the desk the little green fang.

Reagan stared at it stupidly.

"What's that?"

"A piece of very good jade," the commissioner replied.

For seconds Mary felt that her fate hung in the balance. Would Reagan recall De Paola's words? Almost it seemed as if a glint of recollection pierced his perplexed scowl.

"Say, if you're offering that as an alibi!" he growled.

"I'm offering it as a bit of evidence which I haven't been able to get a line on," the commissioner said frankly. "And, by the way, perhaps you know I've ordered a second autopsy to make sure nothing has been overlooked."

Reagan winced. The first autopsy, at Reagan's own sub-rosa suggestion, had been rushed through with disgraceful haste by a coroner anxious to obey the injunction to hush the matter up.

"I'm expecting a report on it by noon," the commissioner went on. "Very likely some new evidence will result from it which will convince you I'm not the murderer." He smiled into Reagan's smoldering eyes.

"You'll have a hard job convincing me," Reagan answered deliberately. "I know Ladue meant to blackmail you, and I'm not so sure she didn't have the goods on you, at that. Ladue was some little girl. Maybe it wasn't the first time you'd called at her place so late, and so quiet—"

Mary flung herself in front of Parker as he sprang at Reagan's ugly jaw.

"Please—I beg you, Parker!" she cried. "Go away, Reagan; I'll get him to resign; only go, quick! Quick!" Her voice was hoarse with horror.

Reagan, who had started for the door, wheeled in his tracks.

"That's the voice I heard over the wire that night!" he cried, startled beyond all caution. His glance flew to the bit of jade shining smooth and green on the commissioner's desk, and his memory nailed at last a wandering thought. Parker's hands dropped to his side, not so much in response to Mary's entreaty as in wonderment at the triumph which suddenly flooded Reagan's face.

"So you're both in it!" Reagan exclaimed.

"No, no!" Mary sobbed, breaking at last under the torture. "Not Parker! Not my husband! I did it—I killed her. You've got to believe me. I killed Henrietta Ladue."

Parker seized her in his arms.

"You don't know what you're saying," he cried roughly. But even he read truth in those staring eyes, heard the ring of it in the story that came from those twisted lips. Silently he drew the girl's head down to his shoulder, holding her in a grip that bruised even as it comforted, and across that drooping figure he met Reagan's sneering smile.

"You can take your choice," said Reagan, who hated to waste time; "your resignation or a warrant for the lady."

"Congratulations!" Parker replied. "I suppose the new commissioner's name is Reagan?"

He put Mary gently into a chair, where she cowered with hidden face, and took up his pen. "I hereby tender my resignation," the pen wrote. Parker's mouth was gray. What mattered the job now? What mattered honor, duty, anything, with this weeping girl thrown on his mercy? Parker signed the paper as the telephone trilled at his elbow. Mechanically he took the receiver from the hook.

"Complete K. O.," Reagan told himself, scanning that face with its lines of defeat.

After a moment the commissioner hung up the receiver.

"Dearest," he said, gathering Mary again in his arms, "you didn't do it. Do you understand, dear? They've completed the autopsy. Henrietta Ladue died of poison."

By the delirium of relief which swept over Mary, Reagan measured the blow that had been dealt his hopes.

"I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" she stammered, half incoherent. "Oh, Parker, it didn't seem possible; all the time, it didn't seem possible I struck hard enough."

Malone! The thought came like a thunderbolt, so staggering was the further relief of it. Obviously, Malone had not administered the poison; obviously, he had supposed the blow struck by Mary had been fatal. Malone, then, was innocent, and need not fear arrest. And, with the danger of Malone's arrest gone, there was gone, also, the danger to Parker of vengeance by Malone's friends.

With this realization, Mary's old-time courage came back with a rush; her old-time hatred of concealment returned.

"Parker, I don't care what happens now. If necessary, I'll tell the whole story, in court or to the newspapers. You mustn't resign now, Parker. You've got to stick to the job till you've cleaned up this case."

Reagan jerked into life again at these words. Cleaning up the Ladue case came uncomfortably near to cleaning up the town.

"Wait a minute," he advised. "How are you"—turning to Mary—"going to prove it wasn't you that gave the poison? You was there; you admit it. You had an argument—a bad one—with Ladue. How'll you prove you didn't slip her the poison?"

The same idea occurred to both Mary and Parker in the pause that followed Reagan's words. To prove that Mary didn't give the poison might be easy enough, but before she proved it Reagan, maddened by his own ill luck,

could, without exceeding his authority, obtain her arrest on suspicion. Nor was even this move beyond Reagan's daring or his vengeance.

Into the silence fell an impatient knock at the door, followed at once by the entrance of the dilettante, De Paola. Dressed, as always, with finicky care, a camellia in his lapel, the little man looked readier for tea on the Avenue than for a visit to police headquarters.

"Ah, those secretaries, typists, and police of yours!" he exclaimed genially. "They bid me wait, wait—but, pouf! I brush them aside. Where are these curiosities you have promised to let me see?"

To divert attention from Mary's troubled face, Parker pulled open a drawer in his desk.

"When you telephoned me that, perhaps, you could identify some of these —" he began, but De Paola interrupted with a cry of delight.

"Si, si! It is even so." He hung above the opened box, inside which a handful of rings flashed beneath the desk light. "I recognize two—three of these. Si, there is the big emerald my poor great-great-grandpapa received from that so subtle enemy. There is my pigeon-blood ruby, presented to an ancestress of mine by a wicked old king who—shall we say—admired her innocent smile. Ah, si, that smile of Principessa Luisa's was ver' mooch valuable—I have her big diamond earrings and I—"

He checked himself and grew whimsically melancholy.

"This is mooch embarrassing for me, no? But, since we are all friends"—his gesture included Reagan—"I will confess a ver' bad little story."

It was another of Henrietta Ladue's escapades. De Paola acknowledged himself the irate Italian who had loved her in Florence, cursed her in Monte Carlo, and discovered after her flight that she had vanished with a goodly

portion of his heirloom rings. Since Henrietta had gayly masqueraded under an assumed name, De Paola found difficulty in tracing his jewels. One clew led him at last to America, where he arrived in time to find Henrietta the center of an unsavory murder mystery. He but recently recognized her photograph in a newspaper.

"She is dead from a blow, si?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, she died of poisoning," Parker answered.

The words seemed to strike a sort of awe into the little man. He pulled at the animated short beard for a moment before he spoke, and when he spoke it was with sadness.

"It is as I feared. Once more that po-lice forefather's ghost is at its work. Henrietta was wicked, si, and dishonest. But I did not wish for her this punishment."

He darted a glance at their mystified faces.

"You do not comprehend? Let me tell you. The doctor has found, perhaps, a tiny spot, a puncture, somewhere on that dead woman's hand?"

"Why, yes, between the second and third fingers of her left hand," said Parker.

De Paola nodded gravely.

"She died of an unusual poison? Si. It is a secret poison, known to my family since early times. You will read of such, ver' often, in ancient records. It is"—he flashed a deprecating smile—"one pleasant old Italian custom. I pursued Henrietta to obtain back my heirloom jewels—true. But more I pursued to prevent what, nevertheless, has occurred. Si, it is powerful. In a few

moments it kills, and even after centuries its strength does not lessen."

He pointed toward a heavy gold ring set with emeralds of ancient cutting. Mary remembered it with a shudder as one of the rings which had gleamed on Mrs. Ladue's hand as that hand grasped the telephone. "You observe?" said De Paola. "It is a gold serpent, with emerald eyes and jade fangs. Under a microscope, you will see that one of the fangs is hollow. If the ring is squeezed in a certain way, a spring is released, the poison is freed, the fang scratches some one ever so slightly— It is over in a moment."

"That so subtle enemy gave my police great-grandpapa this ring well loaded with poison. Then he grasped great-grandpapa's hand, and that old gentleman po-lice died ver' unexpected. Poor Henrietta, she have squeezed her fingers together—pouf! She is gone." He sighed gustily and dismissed Henrietta from his mind.

"The Florentine Galleries," he said to Mary; "I will take you there to-morrow, si? And, perhaps, we shall find a book that tells more of poison rings, an art most practical."

Still a bit white about the mouth Mary nodded. As she passed Reagan on her way out she handed him a palmful of tiny paper scraps.

"Please put this in the wastebasket," she said, looking him coldly in the eye.

Reagan recognized the writing as the commissioner's. Half the word "resignation" winked up at him. He opened his hand as if the paper scraps were red hot, and they fell in a little white shower at his feet.

THE END.



Where's My Handkerchief?

By JESSIE HENDERSON

PARDON these moans! I have aged with rapidity

Since the dark tidings were sobbed in mine ear.

Life to me now is an arid frigidity;

I have grown old in a twinkling; and fear

Walks by my side as I peer at the coryphées

Strolling the Avenue, careless and calm.

Oh, for the blondes of the classic and hoary days!

Gilead, Gilead, where is thy balm?

Scientists tell us—their horrible notion

Tortures me, waking, and torments my dreams—

Scientists tell us—forgive my emotion—

That blondes are decreasing, and swiftly, it seems.

Hinc illæ lachrymæ, hinc my despair—

Ere long there won't be any blondes anywhere!

If I am childish, with sobs multitudinous

Thus to give vent to my grief and surprise,

What world, I ask you, can be pulchritudinous,

Full of black ringlets, black looks, and black eyes?

What will our history be, our biography?

Nay, what our poetry, painting and prose?

What will our theater be, what our stenography,

Without a blonde in 'em, do you suppose?

Can't we revoke a decree so pestiferous?

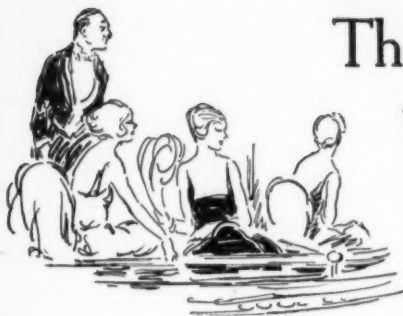
Must our Rapunzels and Iseults all go?

Spirits of Henna, protect the auriferous!

Save them, Peroxide, by arts that you know!

If blondes are abolished, this follows perforce:

How can we have art and romance—and divorce?



The Woman Who Understood Men

By Beth Warner

MRS. CARDEN'S drawing-room was dusky with its carefully shaded lights, and sweet with the roses Drew Cheney had sent that morning. Leila Carden herself was dusky and sweet, and fitted into the setting like another languorous flower. Which was quite as she had intended.

Drew Cheney, being entirely—almost primitively—masculine, was utterly ignorant of the carefully studied effect. He was merely conscious that Mrs. Carden was a darn attractive woman, and that it was great to get in out of the rain. He grinned engagingly, as only twenty-three can grin, and said it was royal of her to let him come again so soon—wished he could thank her half enough for last night—

Leila Carden gave him a slim, white hand and smiled her slow-dawning smile.

"These have already done that for you," she murmured, touching the heavy-headed roses with caressing fingers. "How did you know that I adored creamy-white ones and loathed all others?"

He hadn't known, he said, sinking down beside her on the lounge; he had merely taken a chance.

"But it was so wonderfully good of you to rescue me that way last night! You can't know what it means to land in a perfectly strange town on a cold, rainy night, not knowing a solitary soul

and feeling blue as the devil, anyhow, and then suddenly to run into an old friend like your husband and be taken out to a real, honest-to-John home, and a marvelous dinner, and some one like you——" He hesitated, embarrassed at his rashness. "Please don't take that the wrong way!" he pleaded. "I simply meant that it's such an age since I've met women of your type—the real thing, you know. This awful knocking around small manufacturing towns—the class of women you meet all the time——" He ran his hand through his hair with embarrassment. "Oh, heavens! I can't seem to find the right words, but I guess you know what I mean, don't you?" He looked at her appealingly.

Mrs. Carden bent her lovely head, wondering just how much more he had meant without exactly knowing it—now.

"Of course, I've only known your husband in a business way," Cheney went on, relieved, "so there wasn't any real reason for his being so darned good to me—or for your bothering, either. But I was so heartily thankful that I simply had to send something, and I took an awful chance that you liked roses." He thrust his hands deep in his pockets and sank back into the lounge with delight. "Gosh, it's great to be here again!"

Mrs. Carden smiled quietly and re-

garded him carefully from under long lashes. He had nice hair, she decided—the kind a woman always wants to run her hands through. She wondered how it grew in the back. And his chin was decidedly good. It was a chin that took what it wanted and asked questions afterward. Her heart missed a cylinder as she allowed the thought to expand. His hands, too—she wondered how they would feel.

His sudden: "Say, may I smoke?" brought her back with a start.

"Please do!" she replied quickly. She took one herself and fitted it into a carved ivory holder. Heavens! Suppose he was a mind reader, or something like that!

"You object?" she asked amusedly, holding her cigarette up for approval, her head on one side. He had looked a little disappointed, she thought.

"You must think I'm provincial!" he laughed. "And, anyhow, what difference would it make if I did—to you?" He looked at her mockingly and she felt a tiny red flag of danger go up inside of her. Ridiculous! She tried to convince herself. He was nothing but a kid. And, anyhow, he was leaving town in a few days. But, all the same, she did not tear down the red flag. Red was one of her favorite colors.

She leaned forward suddenly, with one of the quick impulses she had found so very effective: one white arm along the low lounge, her dark eyes dewy with—many things.

"Tell me about yourself," she commanded softly.

An hour later Garrett Carden, back from an unusually trying day at the office, let himself in at his own front door. He stood back from the drawing-room doorway while divesting himself of his overcoat, and watched, with a slightly ironical smile, the pretty little tête-à-tête on the lounge: the man, at one end, leaning forward with intensity,

head lifted, his voice resonant with hopes and ambitions, goals to attain, and dreams; the woman, sinking deep into the other end, her arms above her head, her lovely eyes soft with understanding.

"Hmm-m-m-m!" meditated Mr. Carden, placing his hat carefully upon its accustomed mahogany peg. "So Leila is up to her old tricks again!" His jaw set in a straight, grim line.

"Is it really as private as it appears," he asked from the doorway, "or may I intrude?"

"Intrude!" Drew Cheney was on his feet and at Carden's side, his young face glowing with pleasure. "Gosh, you're the very person needed to make the party complete! I was hoping I'd get a talk with you to-night."

Carden wrung the outstretched hand heartily.

"Mighty glad to see you again, Cheney," he responded with equal sincerity. He liked Drew Cheney—had liked him immensely for years. Drew was a fine, clean, unspoiled boy; he certainly hoped Leila wouldn't get the kid into a mess.

"Sorry the weather's giving you such a miserable welcome," he continued, throwing himself into an armchair. "Had tea yet, Leila? No? Good!" He settled himself comfortably. "Well, Cheney, let's hear your impression of our superb metropolis."

Serving tea in the intimate dusk of firelight, her perfectly appointed tea wagon, with its roses and silver, serving as a delicate plaything, was to Leila Carden among the royal family of sports. And she did it superbly. So reflected Garrett Carden with something akin to pride—and irony. So, also, reflected Drew Cheney with his appreciation of art. She certainly was darned attractive! Carden was a lucky cuss. So was she, too, for that matter. It looked like a mighty fine combination altogether.

He was wondering as he rose to go half an hour later, whether he couldn't find some excuse to come again. This was the oasis and he the weary traveler. Then, too, he wanted to get Carden's ideas on the territory; his views on the power of the local press; his advice on selling the natives—on scores of things they were both interested in. Carden was a man who talked little and said much, a man who had battled his way from the bottom to the top, with phenomenal speed and the respect of all who came in contact with him. To Cheney the opportunity to talk with him was priceless.

"You must come again—soon," suggested Leila as he took her hand. "How about dropping in for dinner next—let me see—suppose we say Friday? All right for you, Garry?"

Garry said it was and Drew accepted with alacrity. It was mighty nice of them to ask him; he'd certainly be there with the proverbial bells!

When at last the door had closed behind Cheney, Carden returned slowly to the drawing-room, pipe clenched in his teeth, jaw set. For several minutes he stood gazing into the smoldering fire, one arm resting on the low mantel, his pipe glowing now and then with ferocious energy. Leila, regarding him languidly from the lounge, successfully produced a yawn. She hated scenes.

One—two—three minutes the clock on the mantel ticked off. Then, taking his pipe out of his mouth, Garrett Carden turned and looked at his wife, his face relaxing into a whimsical, indulgent smile.

"All right, old girl; good hunting to you," he said simply.

Leila flushed slightly; then laughed.

"You can be a darling, can't you, Garry?" she drawled affectionately.

Leila Carden had reached the age of thirty-two with amazingly few traces of her progress, and only one deeply rooted

conviction, namely: the infallibility of her own charm.

She had been married to Garrett Carden ten years—a fact which she liked to keep in quiet prominence—on the drawing-room table of her personality, so to speak. It gave her a sense of warm, invincible security, and it furnished a safe, neutral-colored background for the delicately spiced flirtations which had chaptered those same ten years.

She had never been deeply in love with Garrett Carden. In fact, she had never been deeply in love at all—except, perhaps, with love itself. Possibly that was the reason why she took it for granted that every man she met was in love with her.

But that Garrett pitied her shallowness in the depths of his great heart had never occurred to her. She would have regarded it as the most fantastic impossibility. But it was a fact—the one great fact which had kept their marriage whole and strong. He loved her, and he knew her a good deal better than she knew herself.

He had been a perfect lamb about Drew, Leila reflected warmly one morning as she carefully scrutinized her eyebrows in the hand mirror. Dear old Garry, what a perfect husband he was, after all! A glow of genuine feeling flooded her. She felt pleasantly wifely and virtuous. He had been an angel, having Drew to dinner so often and fixing up all those clever little parties. Dear old Garry! She reflected upon the thought at length. The glow of wifely virtue was as pleasant as it was unique.

It came to an end abruptly upon the arrival of a familiar florist's box. She tore the cover off eagerly. Great, heavy, scarlet poppies! She was conscious of a slight, momentary disappointment. She had hoped for orchids, or, at least, roses.

And then, suddenly, something flashed through her mind that seemed to stop her heart beating—an old, half-forgotten

saying she had heard at school. It came back to her with sudden clearness:

"Poppies stand for passion,
So the lovers say.
Leave your home for love, my child,
When poppies pass your way."

Poppies! She stood still, rooted to the floor with a half joy, half fear, tingling with happiness. What did they mean? Did Drew know the old rhyme? Did he mean—did he mean— She searched frantically for a card. Ah, there it was.

Will not be back from town until after ten, but may I drop in then? I *must* see you to-night!

Leila walked, swaying, to her dressing table, her hands pressed to her burning cheeks, her eyes like stars. It had come at last! She had known it was inevitable from the first; he was so simple to read, so gloriously young and ingenuous! His very defenses were transparent; the way he refused to look at her when he spoke of things very close and holy to him; his startled expression when she had once playfully kissed his hair. He was afraid of her; afraid of himself, and his love for her. And *now* she had won. She had known it all along, but this was proof! She threw back her head with an exultant half sob, half laugh of victory. He had admitted it at last! She had understood only too well.

Of course, she would take all her personal things: clothes, face creams, perfumes, books. She sorted them over with tingling fingers. But it would mean two suit cases. What a nuisance! She tossed the things on the bed in feverish excitement. Pictures! She caught up one of her mother—a weak, sweet-faced woman—and threw it on the pile. Garry's? She scrutinized it impersonally; the grave, tired face, the steady eyes, and grim mouth. With a laugh at the absurd impulse, she tossed it back on the table.

The little mound on the bed grew rap-

idly. Lacy things; fragile hats; French heels; exquisite toilet articles, rose strewn; pictures of herself; a copy of "India's Love Lyrics." She fluttered around the room, collecting odds and ends, her pulses throbbing, her eyes like stars.

It was almost ten thirty that night when Drew Cheney lifted the Cardens' old-fashioned brass knocker. He came in looking tired and worn, but radiantly happy. His eyes held that light which is like a flame—the light of dreams almost realized.

"Drew!"

Leila, her heart beating like a trip hammer, rose to meet him, both hands outstretched. He grasped them eagerly and shook them with boyish embarrassment.

"Leila!" His voice held an unmistakable note of exultance. "Thought I'd never get here—and with so much to tell you! Where's Garry?"

"He has gone to Pittsburgh," she answered slowly, her eyes steady on his. "He left this afternoon—on receipt of a telegram." The commonplace words throbbed with significance.

"Gosh, I'm sorry!" He seemed almost genuinely upset. She smiled to herself. How much longer was he going to keep up this absurd mask to both of them? It was so transparent to any one who understood men as she did.

She sank to the couch and drew him down to her.

"The poppies told me you had something to tell me," she murmured, her eyes ready to leap into flame.

He caught her hands in both of his.

"Tell you! Oh, Leila, it means so much to me that it almost chokes!" he told her.

"Drew!" Her voice thrilled even her own ears.

"Leila, you've understood all the time? You've seen what I have had to keep from telling you—what I tried not

to show? Oh, what a God-given thing is a woman's understanding!" He bowed his head to her hands and then raised it quickly, his eyes shining. "I couldn't tell you in words—I was honor bound not to—but you let me talk to you about my dreams and hopes, and you understood—you saw that there was a woman in them!"

Leila closed her eyes against the ecstasy which swept her.

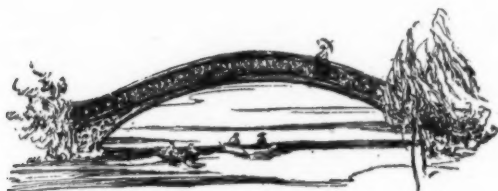
"Yes, Drew, I understood everything," she murmured almost inaudibly.

"Well, I can tell you in words now!" His voice thrilled exultantly. "She wired me this morning that everything had been settled and there was no more

need for keeping our engagement secret. I'm leaving to-morrow morning for home, and we're going to be married on Friday! Oh, Leila, you've been so wonderful to me; you've understood so perfectly all along! And I'm so marvelously happy!" He bent his head to his hands to hide his emotion, then lifted it quickly. "By the way, were the flowers all right this morning?"

"Yes," came a voice from Leila, far, far away.

"I'm glad of that. I had to rush off in such a hurry that I didn't have time to choose them; told the florist to send you the freshest ones he had. What were they—roses?"



FULFILLMENT

LET not the years weigh heavy on your shoulders.

I am the hills. Look up and rest your eyes.
I am the dawn upon the highest boulders,
Flaming with hope for you, O dear and wise.

I am the wind that winnows through the gloaming.

I am the paths of courage for your feet.
I am the quiet stars that guide your homing
On the last trail, O beautiful and sweet!

And when they say that death true hearts can sever

Laugh at their folly. Tell them that you know
Your lover lives forever and forever,
Stronger to hold you now than long ago!

MARION FRANCIS BROWN.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

ONE of his recent biographers tells an amusing tale about Ramsay MacDonald, the new British premier. The brilliant leader of the Labor party is notoriously charming of manner and socially engaging. At a dinner party, some time before his elevation to the premiership, he was flanked on either side by a lovely, if not politically astute, lady, the one more demanding of his attention, however, than the other. The more aggressive of the two, jealous of the favor bestowed mathematically upon them, launched her prettiest compliment upon the debonair gentleman. "How unfortunate," said she, with well-feigned regret, "that you have the same name as that horrid member of Parliament from the Labor party." It would appear that even the world's most famous can be effectively lost within the confines of a drawing-room or banquet hall.



ON the roster of those "lost" from its midst, Long Island society recorded the name of Sandy Pendleton. Sandy had left his gorgeous home and his lovely little wife, Rita, in order to accompany a relief expedition into the arctic regions. And, after the first few weeks, all communications from him dramatically ceased. No one could know that his ship was ice-locked, no

one could guess that a little later he roamed the icy wilderness alone, half-crazed, with none for companion but the hideous frozen body of Ripley, once the warmest of companions. And then suddenly to the smart Long Island country seat that had known him came the devastating report that Sandy Pendleton was luxuriating in the Orient, tasting in sybaritic fashion all the lure and lavishness of ancient China; was, in fact, cruising about aimlessly on Wally Sims' yacht. Rita Pendleton's splendid courage wavered. There was much talk about Ulysses and Penelope. You remember your mythology? Penelope remained steadfast to Ulysses, bravely waiting his return, denying herself to all that would have given her surcease from her grief. And Ulysses? Ulysses lingered in the purple isles of dalliance, enjoying himself, so the story goes, to the full. All intimation of Sandy's forgetfulness Rita sought to refute. But her faith in his integrity was slowly crumpling pathetically. But this is just the beginning of their story. It had romantic ramifications. One of the most gripping novelettes that has ever been written for your entertainment, we believe, is Izola Forrester's newest tale, called reminiscently "The Isle of Dalliance." Read it in the July number of AINSLEE'S. And then tell us why you like it.

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IT was spring, and dancing out on to the Rue Scribe, a packet of mail in her hand, Amy Conant, gay, care-free, wealthy, met abruptly one of the most surprising situations that had ever assailed her equanimity. Her visit abroad was very definitely changed by it. It ushered in, in fact, a year of surprising events. And then it was, presently, spring once more. On the Rue Scribe again she met an even more overwhelming surprise. A street of encounters, indeed. An absorbing tale, unique in its unerring feminine psychology, Beatrix Demarest Lloyd's latest

short story, called "Street of Encounters," will please you in the extreme.



THE July number will contain also stories by Rice Gaither, Warren E. Schutt, Dorothy Stockbridge, Jessie Henderson, and others, as well as the second part of Beatrice Ravenel's story, "His Last Appearance," another generous installment of Winston Bouvé's serial, "Year of Oblivion," and another of the gripping "Eyes of Greed" tales.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1924.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Helen L. Lieder, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Ainslee's Magazine Company, Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York

N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: Clarence C. Ver-nam, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,

of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

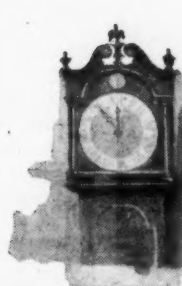
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of March, 1924. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public, No. 183, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1925.)

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One Dollar

—for underwear satisfaction

TO GET the most for your money in athletic underwear, follow these rules:

Pay One Dollar—no more.

Look for the Topkis label.

Comfort? You'll hardly know you have Topkis on! Roomy all over; especially legs and arm-holes. Topkis fits! Good fabrics. Sound tailoring. Topkis wears and wears.

Men's Shirts and Drawers, 75c a garment. Boys' Union Suits, Girls' Bloomer Union Suits, and Children's Waist Union Suits, 75c. In Canada, Men's Union Suits, \$1.50.

Free Booklet tells the whole story. Write for it.

TOPKIS BROTHERS COMPANY, Wilmington, Del.

General Sales Offices: 350 Broadway, New York City

Ask for TOPKIS Underwear.

Look for the TOPKIS label.



Buy Topkis by the Box
—Six union suits for \$6. Some men pay as much for three suits—but they don't know Topkis.



Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

"I am 62 years of age, and looked like 80—a fitter subject for the Old People's Home than an active, outside insurance solicitor. Constipation had been the bane of my life. My feet could hardly carry me along, and my conversational powers were exhausted during business hours. About 12 months ago I was recommended as a last resort to try Fleischmann's Yeast. I can hardly believe it, neither can my associates—that I am the same man of a year ago. 'You look and act like a man of forty,' say my friends today." (A letter from Mr. Russell Carolan of St. Louis, Mo.)



"Five years ago as an office worker in Milwaukee, I could answer to the description of the 'run-down, nervous, suffering woman' in the patent medicine ads. My sallow complexion was my greatest worry and I was always troubled with constipation. I had taken medicine for four years, but the doctor said that drugs could not effect a permanent cure. Two years ago I learned from the girls in the office to eat Fleischmann's Yeast. Today I am frequently complimented on my fresh complexion."

(Extract from a letter of Mrs. Ella Fitzgerald of Ypsilanti, Michigan)

"A physical wreck—I was irritable, nervous, debilitated. I tried nearly every curative treatment known to science, but to no avail. I was simply depleted of nervous energy. When I heard of Fleischmann's Yeast I was skeptical of the wonderful results attributed to it. In a week's time, after using the yeast, my digestion became better, my complexion brighter, and I slowly regained lost vitality. Is it any wonder that I am a convert to the curative qualities of Fleischmann's Yeast?" (Mr. Clair C. Cook, of Los Angeles, California)



You may not realize its amazing power

—Put this familiar food to work for you

These remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural

food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health* is yours once more.

*Dissolve one cake in a glass of water
(just hot enough to drink)*

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be pur-

chased in tablet form. *All grocers have it. Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in your ice box as well as in the grocer's.* Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. 2-5, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.





*Bathe the skin
the Fairy way!*

A BATH with Fairy Soap is a delightful experience! The rich, foamy, delicately fragrant lather is produced in a jiffy.

And you really are clean and refreshed and invigorated—because Fairy Soap acts that way on the skin. The whitest soap in the world—and as pure as it is white!

White clear through. Nothing in it but the finest, purest ingredients. A real aid to permanent skin health, whether used for the toilet or bath.

And remember—the oval cake is economical because it wears down to a thin wafer without breaking.



It's white! It's pure! It floats!

FAIRY SOAP

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

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Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

MAKE \$25 to \$50 a Week representing Clows' Famous Philadelphia Hosiery, direct from mill—for men, women, children. Every pair guaranteed. Prices that win. Free book "How to Start" tells the story. George Clows Company, Desk 66, Philadelphia, Pa.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything; men and women \$30 to \$100 weekly, operating our "Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Booklet free. W. Billiger, Bagsdale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

SILVERING MIRRORS, French plate. Easily learned; immense profits. Plans free. Wear Mirror Works, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

MAKE MONEY silvering mirrors, all kinds plating, knives, spoons, auto head-lights. Outfits furnished. Free booklet. International Laboratories, Dept. 110, 311 Fifth Ave., New York.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Two orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 110, East Grand, N. J.

\$60-\$200 a week. Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Easily applied. Free samples. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 428 B North Clark, Chicago.

EARN \$10 daily silvering mirrors, plating, refinishing metalware, headlamps, chandeliers, bedsteads. Outfits furnished. Deale Silver Laboratories, 1133 Broadway, New York.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 229, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS—Start \$133 month. Railroad pass; expenses paid; questions free. Columbus Institute, B-3, Columbus, Ohio.

BIG MONEY and fast sales; every owner buys gold initials for his auto; you charge \$1.50, make \$1.41. 10 orders daily easy. Samples and information free. World Monogram Co., Dept. 12, Newark, N. J.

SELL us your spare time. Write show-cards for us. We instruct and supply work; no experience necessary. Wilson Methods Limited, Dept. 22, Toronto, Canada.

AGENTS Coining Money applying Monograms on automobiles; you charge \$1.50, profit \$1.40; \$15 daily easy; experience unnecessary; free samples. Worcester Monogram Co., Worcester, Mass.

MEN—We are seeking a few good men in choice territory to sell Studebaker Watches, direct from factory to consumer on New, easy payment selling plan; save 50%. Highest grades, 21 Jewel, extra thin models, insurance for a lifetime. Choice of 34 Art Beauty Cases in newest effects of green gold, yellow gold, and white gold. Opportunity to represent highest grade line—part time or full time—and make substantial profits. Beautiful art catalogue, and details of selling plan sent Free. Write, stating age, experience, references, and locality interested in. Studebaker Watch Co., 305C, South Bend, Ind.

\$1 HOUR. Write show cards for us at home. Particulars free. Kwik Showcard System, 64-C Bond, Toronto, Canada.

Agents and Help Wanted—Continued

AGENTS to travel by automobile to introduce our fast selling, popular priced household necessities. The greatest line on earth. Make \$10.00 a day. Complete outfit and automobile furnished free to workers. Write today for exclusive territory. American Products Co., 1836 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

CLERKS for Government Posts and other good positions. \$1400-\$2300 yearly. Experience unnecessary. Full particulars free by writing G. W. Robbins, Civil Service Expert, 292 Burchell Bldg., Washington, D. C.

\$5 TO \$15 DAILY—(Sworn Proof). Introducing New Guaranteed Hose. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. You simply write orders, we deliver and collect. Your pay daily, also monthly bonus. Spare time satisfactory. Mac-O-Chee Hosiery Company, Room 4503, Cincinnati, Ohio.

SHOES—Become our local salesman selling high-grade shoes direct to wearer. Quick seller and good commission. Experience not required. Tanners Shoe Mfg. Co., 601 C St., Boston, Mass.

SELL COAL in carload lots. Side or main line. Experience unnecessary. Earn week's pay in an hour. Liberal drawing account arrangement. Washington Coal Company, 746 Coal Exchange Building, Chicago.

WANTED. Men, Women, United States Government. \$1800-\$2300. Experience unnecessary. Dept. E. C. S. S., 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

Astrology

ASTROLOGY—Stars tell Life's Story. Send birthdate and time for trial reading. Eddy, 1085 B. Suite 74, Kansas City, Missouri.

Detectives Wanted

BE A DETECTIVE. Excellent opportunity, good pay, travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 436 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

MEN—Age 17 to 55. Experience unnecessary. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Write George Wagner, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, New York.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS Guidebook. Solves Mysteries, Domestic Problems, Business Irregularities and makes Detective Experts. Mailed \$1.50. Capt. Dorey, 1143 Amsterdam Avenue, New York.

Help Wanted—Female

\$6-\$18 a dozen decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 La-Grange, Ind.

Art

"LIFE STUDIES" For Artists, Students, and Collectors. Miniature samples 25c. Circular Free. Michael Simms, Chandlerville, Ohio.

Help Wanted—Male

EARN \$110 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet, CM-28 Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions \$117-\$256, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Osment, 309, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

MEN over 18 willing to travel. Make secret investigations, reports. Salary and expenses. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former Govt. Detective, St. Louis.

DETECTIVES needed everywhere; cities, towns. Free particulars. Write National Detective System, 185 East 79th, New York.

DETECTIVE AGENCY opportunities for ambitious men. Experience unnecessary. We train you free. Clarke System, Box 239, Providence, R. I.

Patents and Lawyers

INVENTORS desiring to secure patents should write for our guide-book "How To Get Your Patent." Send sketch or description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 413, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 644 O St., Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for free guide books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch of invention for Examination and Instructions. No Charge for the Above Information. Victor J. Evans & Co., 787 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. Patented or unpatented. Write Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, St. Louis, Mo.

Stammering

ST-STU-T-T-TERING And Stammering Cured At Home. Instructive booklet free. Walter McDonnell, 80 Potomac Bank Building, Washington, D. C.

Personal

ETIQUETTE FOR EVERYBODY. Complete for all occasions. Ten cent booklet. Dime or Stamps to Information Service, S. S. 1322 New York Avenue, Washington.

ARE YOU BASHFUL? Self-conscious? Send dime for particulars how to overcome these troubles. Veritas, 1400 Broadway, New York. Desk 22.

Farm Lands

20 acres or more of our best land in Michigan. \$20 to \$30 per acre; near town 3,000 pop. \$10 down, bal. long time. 52 page book Free. Seevert Land Co., 11255 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

How Do You Look In a Bathing Suit?

The good old swimming days are here. Oh, boy! But it's great to rip off the old shirt, into your suit and — **SPLASH!!** But what a shock to some of the poor girls when they see their heroes come out with flat chests and skinny arms instead of the big, husky frames they expected to see.

You Are Out of Luck

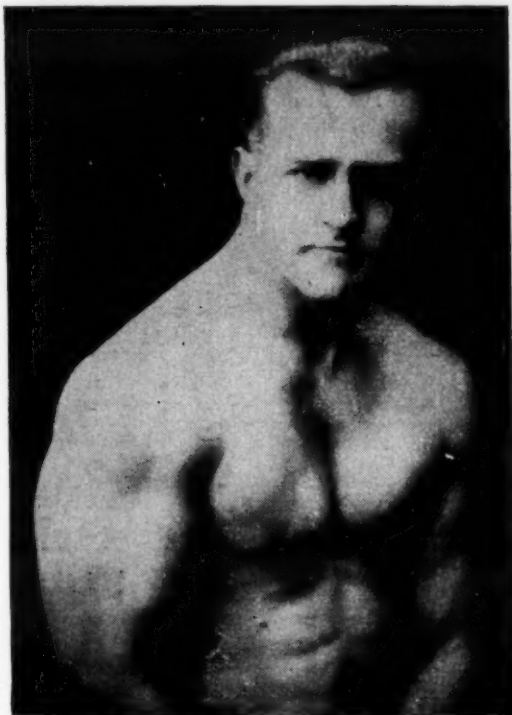
Don't try to make excuses. You are just out of luck. It's your own fault. You can't blame anyone but yourself. What are you going to do? She is going to find you out.

A Physique to Be Proud Of

It's not too late. Snap into it and I can save you yet. It means hard work and plenty of it, but—wait till you see the results.

The Muscle Builder

My job is to build muscle. That is why they call me The Muscle Builder. In just 30 days I am going to add one full inch to your biceps. Yes, and two inches on your chest in the same length of time. But that's only a starter. I am going to broaden out those shoulders and shoot a quiver up your old backbone. I am going to put a man's neck on you and a pair of legs to balance the strong sturdy body they support. You will have a spring to your step and a flash to your eye, radiating the dynamic life within you. Before summer is past you will never recognize your former self. You will have a strong, sturdy, virile body to be really proud of. You will be admired for your perfect manhood—while others are given glances of pity and scorn. This is no idle prattle, fellows. I don't just promise these things. I guarantee them. Are you with me? Let's go! Time is short and we have a job to do.



Earle E. Liederman

America's Leading Authority on Physical Education

Send for My New 64-page Book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

IT IS FREE

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5006, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN

Dept. 5006, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents, for which you are to send me, without obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

(Please write or print plainly)

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

Help! Help! Help!

***Get in the Fight to Prove Fiction Readers seriously read
and consider advertising in Fiction Magazines***

It is a well-known fact that fiction magazines provide clean, wholesome entertainment for millions of discriminating readers. That these magazines are taken into the best homes in the community and are thoroughly read and appreciated by every member of the family.

Logically then, with this family interest, fiction magazines provide an ideal introduction for a nationally advertised product. But some advertisers have the idea that readers of fiction magazines do not seriously read and consider the advertising section. We want you to help prove differently by selecting from this magazine the particular advertisement that appeals to you and to tell us briefly in a letter which advertisement you have selected and WHY.

We know you would willingly do this as a friendly service, but to instill the spirit of competition we have arranged a contest for cash prizes. It costs nothing to enter this contest. There are no rules. We only ask you to mention the magazine and issue you are criticizing. Prizes will be awarded to the four best letters submitted and the prize list is as follows:

FIRST PRIZE	- - \$15.00
SECOND "	- - 5.00
THIRD "	- - 3.00
FOURTH "	- - 2.00

Contest for this issue closes July 1st, 1924

Ainslee's Announces the Winners of the March Advertising Prize Contest

First Prize, \$15.00,	Mrs. C. E. Williams, 67 South Parkview Ave., Columbus, Ohio. <i>For letter submitted on Quaker Puffed Rice and Wheat.</i>
Second Prize, 5.00,	Mrs. Lina L. Hammond, Atlantic, Iowa. <i>For letter submitted on Corona Typewriter Co.</i>
Third Prize, 3.00,	G. G. Rooker, P. O. Box 1347, Spokane, Wash. <i>For letter submitted on Eastman Kodak Co.</i>
Fourth Prize, 2.00,	H. H. Palmer, 700 New Britain Ave., Hartford, Conn. <i>For letter submitted on Willys-Overland, Inc.</i>

The Advertising Department again thanks the many readers for their very kind interest

Winners for the April issue will be announced in the July issue

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

"THE AIR IS FULL OF THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T MISS"



Your "B" Battery is the life of your Radio Set

THE broadcasting stations are transmitting wonderful programs for enjoyment in your home. Here a wonderful aria is being sung by a famous soprano—there a radio drama is being given. Here is a play-by-play report of some important athletic event—there an address of national importance. The successful reproduction of all these is absolutely dependent upon the quality of your "B" Battery, for without its silent, energizing current your set would be lifeless—mute.

The makers of Eveready "B" Batteries have a thirty-year background of experience in battery making. They have expended millions in money and time, in men and methods, in machinery and laboratory research, to bring the dry cell to its highest point of efficiency. They have pioneered



Eveready "B" Battery No. 766
22 1/2 volts. Six Fahnestock Spring Clip Terminals, giving variable voltage from 16 1/2 to 22 1/2 volts, in 1 1/2-volt steps. Length, 6 3/4 in.; width, 4 1/4 in.; height, 3 1/4 in. Weight, 9 lbs.

and assisted in the march of radio, and out of this broad experience have contributed that marvel of vitality and endurance—the Eveready "B" Battery—that your radio set may pulsate with life and bring forth thrilling speech and rippling music.

Be good to your set. Equip it with Eveready "B" Batteries that will serve and endure. Use Eveready Batteries throughout your set, for there is an Eveready Radio Battery for every radio use—the right battery by test and proof. Insist on Eveready Batteries—they last longer.

Manufactured and guaranteed by

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
Headquarters for Radio Battery Information

New York

San Francisco

Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited, Toronto, Ontario

Informative and money-saving booklets on radio batteries sent free on request. If you have any questions regarding radio batteries, write to Radio Division, G. C. Furness, Manager, National Carbon Company, Inc., 208 Orton Street, Long Island City, N. Y.



EVEREADY

Radio Batteries

—they last longer

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



Have you ever tried it this way?

YOU know, of course, that Listerine has dozens of uses as a safe antiseptic. But do you know of its unusual properties as a safe, non-irritating deodorant?

Whenever you don't have time for a tub or shower, or when these are not accessible, simply try dousing on Listerine. See how cool, refreshed and clean it leaves you feeling.

And best of all, Listerine used this way as a deodorant cannot irritate or injure the most delicate skin. Rather, it is soothing, healing, evaporates quickly, and cannot stain garments. It is the ideal deodorant.—*Lambert Pharmaceutical Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

Interesting news!

Listerine Throat Tablets, containing the antiseptic oils of Listerine, are now available. * * While we frankly admit that no tablet or candy lozenge can deodorize the breath, the Listerine antiseptic oils in these tablets are very valuable as a relief for throat irritations. * * They are 25 cents a package.



BLUEBIRD PEARLS for Happiness



The Jeweler is the Judge

ISN'T it logical that a jeweler would be the person best able to advise you in the selection of pearls?

A jeweler *knows* BLUEBIRD and genuine pearls, and the fact that he features both is a compliment to BLUEBIRD!

BLUEBIRD prices are standard—with no bargain-counter skeletons in their closet!

Like all fine jewelry, BLUEBIRD PEARLS are sold only in jewelry stores!

Prices from \$400 to \$10
THE HENSHEL COMPANY
10 East 34th St., New York City

FRECKLES

Now Is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots. Simply get an ounce of Othine from any druggist and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than an ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful, clear complexion.

Be sure to ask for double-strength Othine, as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove freckles.

Sheik-Lure — New Imported Perfume Sensation



Solid — No Liquid — No Bottle

Just a touch on the skin and the haunting romantic fragrance thrills and lingers days. Everybody adores it. An aroma de luxe, beautiful baby's breath—parent case for lavallieres or vest pocket. Unlike a liquid \$10.00 value.

SEND NO MONEY. Two postpaid only \$1.00 when perfume arrives or, if you wish, enclose dollar bill with order. Shik sold FREE with first order. Money back if not DELIGHTED. Lure Both Sexes. Send post card or letter NOW.

Lure Importers, West 1924, Evanston, Ill.

Teach Children To Use Cuticura

Soothes and Heals Rashes and Irritations
Cuticura Soap Keeps the Skin Clear



Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



How Did Your Garters Look This Morning?

This friendly reminder to forgetful men has earned for Bostons the thanks of thousands of careful dressers. Be comfortable by knowing your garters are fresh always.

GEORGE FROST COMPANY, BOSTON
MAKERS OF VELVET GRIP HOSE SUPPORTERS FOR ALL THE FAMILY



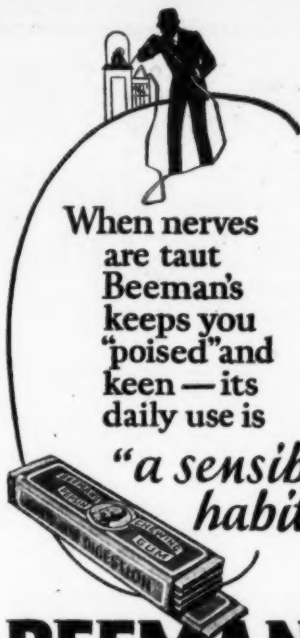
WHITING-ADAMS BRUSHES

Vulcan Rubber Cemented Shaving Brushes

True friends of shavers and razors. Easy shaves and smooth skins. Bristles, hair and handles never part company. Held with pure rubber vulcanized as hard as granite. Sterilized completely, sealed singly in packages. Infection cannot come from them.

Send for Illustrated Literature
JOHN L. WHITING-J. J. ADAMS CO.
Boston, U. S. A.

Brush Manufacturers for Over 114 Years
and the Largest in the World



When nerves are taut Beeman's keeps you "poised" and keen — its daily use is

"a sensible habit"

BEEMAN'S

Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

Bright EYES Are An Asset

Clear, sparkling EYES are an aid to success, both in business and society. Keep your EYES constantly bright and alert through the daily use of *Murine*. This harmless lotion instantly imparts new life to dull, heavy EYES.

Write *Murine Company*, Dept. 61, Chicago, for FREE Eye Care Book

MURINE FOR YOUR EYES

What Brake Lining came on your Car?



YOU may not know what make of lining your manufacturer supplied. But it is mighty important to know that your brakes stay ready to meet each new emergency of modern motoring.

Multibestos, the Brake Lining with the Interlocking Weave, is so dependable at all times, and *lasts for such a long time*, that the makers of a majority of America's cars specify it as original factory equipment.

When you have your brakes relined, ask for Multibestos.

MULTIBESTOS

THE BRAKE LINING
with the Interlocking Weave



New Auto Maps, only 10c

RAND McNALLY & CO., America's best-known map makers, have just printed a new series of absolutely up-to-date Touring Maps, covering every state. By special arrangement, for a short period, we can send you any states you wish for only 10c per map, in return for address of dealer or shop where you have your brakes relined. Order now. Specify sections or states you want.

MULTIBESTOS COMPANY
Dept. A. F. 6, Walpole, Mass., U. S. A.



She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

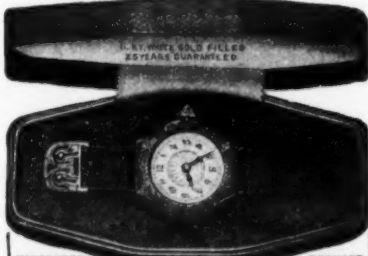
She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets* which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that the *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them; or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY

1715 General Motors Bldg., Detroit, Mich.



IMPORTERS
SALE

14 KT. WHITE GOLD FILLED

REDUCED
TO \$6.25

New Tonneau Shape - Regular \$20 Value

Wonderful Bargain, 6 Jewel Wrist Watch, regulated and adjusted, Euxine case, 20 year guarantee. Fancy dial, sapphire crown, silk grosgrain ribbon.

FREE Handsome Velvet Gift Case

SEND NO MONEY. Pay postman on arrival \$6.25 plus 10c postage. If money order accompanies order, we pay postage. Money back guarantee protects you.

SUPREME JEWELRY MFG. CO.
434 Broadway, Dept. 6010 New York, N. Y.



Get this, men—

A complete assortment of the world's finest smoking tobaccos—sent to any smoker anywhere—on 10 days approval

A new idea for Pipe-Smokers: 12 famous tobaccos, packed in a handsome Humidor—shipped to you direct to help you find the soul-mate for your pipe.

GUARANTEED BY

The American Tobacco Co.

MOST men have written their John Hancocks on a lot of "dotted lines." But, if you're a pipe-smoker, we'll wager that you've never signed a fairer, sweeter contract than the little coupon at the bottom of this page.

Just a few strokes of your pen—and you can end your quest of years for a perfect smoking tobacco.

But we are getting ahead of our story.

A Test of the "12 Best" for only \$1.50

If you were to try all 12 of these tobaccos in full size packages, the cost would be:

Blue Bear25
Capitan30
Imperial Cube Cut30
Herbert "Toryton"25
Old English Curve Cut15
The Guerrick30
Carlton Club15
Yale Nicotina25
Fish's Seaside Mixture15
Three States25
Willi Laskia45
Louisiana Perique25

Total . . . \$3.05

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Ten-Day Approval Offer

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Send no money. Just sign and mail the coupon. That will bring you the Humidor assortment direct from our factories to your den. When the postman brings the package, deposit \$1.50 with him, plus postage.

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Address _____

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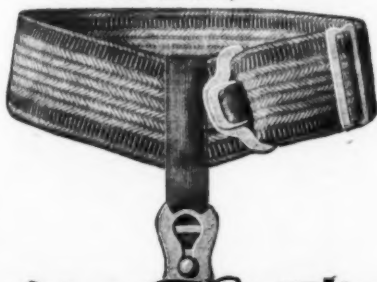
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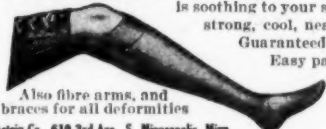
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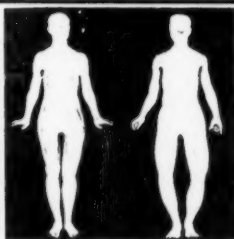
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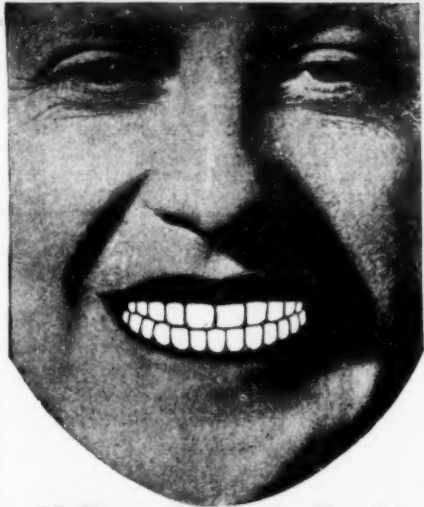
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